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ABSTRACT

Based on the idea that expanding the literary canon has to mean more than simply incorporating "nontraditional" texts into literature courses, this book presents essays that address such issues as text selection, course design, and the effects of multicultural literature on students of color. After an introduction by the editors, the essays are, as follows: (1) "Toward the 'Success' of a 'New Canon': Radical Introspection as Critical Practice" (James C. Hall); (2) "'Who Are All These People?': Some Pedagogical Implications of Diversity in the Multicultural Classroom" (Bruce A. Goebel); (3) "Race and Representation: Students of Color in the Multicultural Classroom" (Abby L. Ferber and Debbie Storrs); (4) "New Canons, New Problems: The Challenge of Promoting a Sense of Kinship among Students of Diversity" (Peter Smagorinsky); (5) "A Journey Defined by Place: Anti-Racism in the College Classroom" (Mary Janell Metzger); (6) "Teaching toward a Multicultural Perspective in the Land That Time Forgot" (Patrick Bryce Bjork); (7) "'Don't Teach It to Us; Teach It to Them': Teaching Cross-Cultural Literature to a Multicultural Class" (Doris Correa Capello and Paul G. Kreuzer); (8) "'Please, Correct Me if I Am Wrong': Teaching Civil Rights and Race Relations in the Age of the Politically Correct" (Suzanne E. Smith); (9) "Teaching Cross-Cultural Encounters and Student Writing with Question-Hypothesis-Questions (QHQs)" (Richard C. Moreland); (10) "Gender, Assessment, and Writing Instruction" (Linda Laube); (11) "The Discourses of 'Difference' in a Feminist Classroom: Multiplicity and the Pedagogical 'Unconscious'" (Mary Beth Hines); (12) "Writing Portfolios in the Multicultural Literature Class" (Ronald Primeau); (13) "Teaching 'China Men' as a Chinese" (Alex J. Wang); (14) "Fear and Loathing in the Classroom; Or, Who's Afraid of Stephen Crane's 'The Monster'?" (Michele Birnbaum); and (15) "Canon Opener: The Single-Event Literature Class" (James Tackach). An afterword, "Getting Beyond 'Kum Ba Ya'" (James Marshall), concludes the book. (NKA)

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Teaching a "New Canon"?

Students, Teachers, and Texts in the College Literature Classroom

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Edited by
Bruce A. Goebel
and James C. Hall

Teaching a "New Canon"?

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Teaching a "New Canon"?

Students, Teachers, and Texts in the College Literature Classroom

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Introduction

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While graduate students at the University of Iowa, we were lucky enough—truly, privileged enough—to have the opportunity to reflect upon what it might mean to be a "teacher" of literature in the post-secondary classroom. And while appreciative of that opportunity and of mentors, students, and colleagues, each subject to the consequences of our early mistakes, we also recognized that our training and reflection were largely improvisatory. We "made up" syllabi, grading policies, seating arrangements, presentation styles, responses to student writing, and so on. As we matured as teacher-scholars in the midst of debates about the canon and cultural diversity, this pedagogical "creativity" was tested as a reliable means of action in response to the dizzying array of demands placed on us by students, texts, and the institution.

We recognized early on that an attention to difference in the classroom must mean a disorientation and resisted the temptation to oversimplify, to retreat into the safety of text-based, teacher-centered approaches. Bruce recalls sensing such a pedagogical epiphany when he realized that students' needs, knowledges, and expectations were perhaps the most important text of any class:

> My interest in the social dynamics of the literature classroom arose primarily out of my experience with a radical juxtaposition of two different teaching contexts. I began my college teaching career at California State University, Fresno, where classes were filled with students of amazingly diverse heritage. In a single class, I might have students of Basque, Armenian, African, Mexican, Hmong, Chinese, Japanese and European heritage. The degrees to which these students continued to share in the cultural values and beliefs of these origins depended, of course,

> upon how long their families had resided in the United States. Nevertheless, the students brought to class discussions of literary texts conflicting opinions and experiences. Each new topic, such as immigration and assimilation, racism, gender roles, or even the value of representative democracy, created a new set of tensions and new alliances among various groups of students. The metaphor that I use to describe my role as teacher in that context is "mediator." I spent most class periods helping students find a way to bridge the differences they had among each other. With no other college teaching experience to contradict me, I assumed that this mediator's role was natural, even universal.
>
> However, when I first began teaching at the University of Iowa, classroom demographics of a different kind demanded immediate attention. The vast majority of students were of Northern European heritage, most had grown up in Iowa, and they largely shared a common politeness and a fear of public display of differences or public argument. This seeming uniformity was occasionally disrupted by the presence of one African American or a couple of students from urban Chicago. Using texts by the same authors (Silko, Morrison, Soto, Faulkner) and using the same methods as I had in California, my class discussions collapsed. On such a topic as assimilation, the students often responded with "Why not? What's the big deal?" No argument erupted. The schisms I was prepared to mend never materialized. When discussing racism students often agreed that it was a thing of the past, any protest otherwise indicating reverse racism. However, if the one African American student were present that day, students were more likely to be silent, peering sideways in hopes that this representative minority might be able to explain what all the fuss was about. A mediator had no significant role in a classroom in desperate need of an instigator.
>
> I understood that my survival as a teacher and my success at democratizing the classroom depended not just on the selection of some representative curriculum but rather on recognizing, reflecting upon, and adapting to the experiences and cultures of the students present in my classroom. My pursuit of a "new canon" began at that moment of realization. For me the political argument behind canonical debates made little sense or little difference if removed from corresponding discussion of pedagogy and the social dynamics of the classroom. Texts alone do not make the difference; teaching makes the difference.

For Jim, the need to explore a comprehensive pedagogical strategy was precipitated by the realities of identity politics:

> As a white scholar and teacher being trained as an African-Americanist, I was aware each and every day of the complexities of my position in the classroom. What might "teaching" mean if it was necessary for me to resist culturally imperialist

> notions of "knowing" or "speaking for?" I felt the need to develop a pedagogy that effectively decentered my presence in the classroom and that dramatized questions of cultural authority. Content challenges to mainstream canonical formations were, in my own case, unimportant if not irrelevant. The texts I was trained to understand and interpret were, with few exceptions, outside the "mainstream." Any syllabus I constructed would inevitably be "multicultural," perhaps even "deconstructive." But what good was this challenge if African American students felt alienated by my presence (and thus saw the canonical change process as corrupt) or if "white" students saw my presence as confirmation of easy "mastery" (and thus saw the canonical change process as not having any relation to social power, not demanding personal reflection). Change, I came to understand, could only take place if one could alter the activity that characterized the exchange between student, teacher, and text. I felt compelled to investigate each and every element of the literature classroom to identify points of contradiction. Where was classroom practice inconsistent with the pluralizing gesture of revising the syllabus reading list? My instincts told me that canonical change had to be "performed" as well as "instituted."

Of course, moving from such reflection to practice is not easy. And the resulting conversations that we had with our colleagues illustrated our frustrations and successes in improvising multiculturalism. In the graduate teaching colloquia which we helped direct, we discussed at length the democratization of the classroom. New teaching assistants, we among them, often began the process of conceiving of the application of democracy in terms of curricular change—the addition of literary texts seen as somehow representative of diverse cultures. Yet, such a focus on opening the canon made for a surprising dissonance in the classroom. As most English educators can attest, students often learn more from a teacher's actions and methods than from anything a teacher says. We witnessed and struggled with the pernicious effects that this hidden curriculum can have on the multicultural literature class. On the one hand, new graduate teachers frequently incorporated innovative content (literary and theoretical) but generally adopted the styles and methods (lecture-recitation) of their own previous teachers. Thus, while exploring texts that argue for more radical notions of democracy, greater voice and authority for the oppressed, and a decentralization of institutional control, these new teachers often utilized patently anti-democratic forms of instruction. As a result, their students "read" and likely internalized the hidden political curriculum, perhaps thinking, "It's OK to read the works of people outside the mainstream, but don't let their words affect your daily actions in any way." Despite the inclusion of canon-opening texts, the values and biases of the traditional canon remained unchallenged in the social dynamics of the classroom.

We felt most imposed upon by these values, for example, when trying to think through questions of evaluation. How were we to reconcile what seemed to be a fairly straightforward decentering of authority with institutional responsibilities to "grade?" Our conversations together were marked by an anxiety about "consistency" and "integrity." How could we be telling students about cultural pluralism and the joys of interpretation while engaging in what seemed at times to be a fairly crude process of determining when people were "right" and "wrong?" While we were never radical relativists, it did seem incumbent upon us to discover what "evaluation" might mean if one was serious about democratic principles and canonical reform. A "new canon" was going to require an intense self scrutiny.

These ruptures between literature, theory, and pedagogy brought us to the realization that there was a real need for systematic exploration about the relationship between classroom practice and the institutionalization of cultural democratic ideals. We set out to put together a collection of essays that would explore the needs of teachers who wish to serve their students effectively and also serve the idea of a "new canon."

Within this collection, the "new canon" refers to more than a set of multicultural texts, fixed or changing. Instead, it indicates and describes comprehensive curricular change and an expanding repertoire of self-reflective teacher knowledge and strategies. In this sense the "new canon" emerges from and embodies an ethical, democratic process removed from utopian theory by its very application to the lives of real, diverse, complex students, teachers, and texts. As James Marshall pointed out during a recent NCTE conference session, theorists of culture and democracy have succeeded in identifying and articulating much of the problematics regarding race, gender, and social class, but they have failed to create a corresponding pedagogical technology—largely because they have failed to account for the social dynamics of real classrooms. Recent pedagogical specialists, from writing process advocates to reader-response theorists, have concretely outlined practical classroom methods but have failed to adequately connect them to contemporary debates regarding the relationship among a literary education, cultural diversity, and democracy.

The fact of the matter is that "professors" of literature are required to spend very little (if any) time reflecting on the pragmatics of their classroom. At one end of the spectrum, teaching is devalued in relation to research, while at the other end, teaching loads are so high as to preclude or make difficult such reflection. Language Arts practitioners at the elementary and secondary levels may find disturbing the necessity of stating the importance of a pedagogical self-consciousness, and of the nascent character of the contributions herein, but it is crucial that we begin to forcefully make the case for the credibility of such reflection as the highest level of professional responsibility.

To the credit of the contributors and because the editors take seriously the complex interactions among students, teachers, and texts, the articles included are largely devoid of utopian tidiness that often characterizes writing about teaching. And, while good theory and good interpretation are essential to the art of teaching, they do not in and of themselves define good teaching. As a result, this collection is less prescriptive and more descriptive regarding what goes on in the literature classroom. In addition to offering an outline of concerns for those who believe in a "new canon," this collection explores, among others, such topics as text selection, course design, writing instruction and evaluation, classroom discourse, the role of diversity in the social dynamics of the classroom, and the effects of multicultural literature on students of color.

The book is concluded by an afterword from the respected researcher of literature classrooms, James Marshall. It is not an accident that Marshall was once the teacher of each of the editors. Our view of the profession and teaching has been dramatically shaped by his thoughtful work. In concluding with his commentary, we seek to reinforce a view of the profession in which the division between "teachers" and "students" is not so clear, in which the exchange of knowledge is dependent upon multiple forms of expertise and our recognition of diverse goals within the literature classroom. *Teaching a "New Canon"?* is meant to be an affirmation of the possibilities of the classroom, as it acknowledges the hard work necessary to formulating a just, fair, and effective pedagogy, and notes, not without regret, the imperfectability of our craft. Perhaps more important, we hope *Teaching a "New Canon"?* encourages and contributes to the burgeoning dialogue regarding reflective teaching practice in the college literature classroom.

I Pragmatics of the Cross-Cultural Classroom

1 Toward the "Success" of a "New Canon": Radical Introspection as Critical Practice

James C. Hall
University of Illinois at Chicago

"Pessimism of the intelligence; optimism of the will."
—Antonio Gramsci (175)

Some may find the title of this collection of essays too optimistic, perhaps even presumptuous. How, it might be asked, can we talk about teaching a "new" canon, when we[1] know that canonical change happens with great resistance and little speed (Purves 1992; Burroughs 1992; Pace 1992)? How can we talk about a "new" canon in the midst of a conservative backlash? Besides, can we honestly say that the sum of our reconstructive, deconstructive, multiculturalist, feminist, and democratist efforts should be another canon, however new, however provocative? We might be well advised to pay attention to the words of Paul Lauter who has made clear the stakes involved in recent national debates about the canon:

> How one defines a cultural canon obviously shapes collegiate curricula and research priorities, but it also helps to determine precisely whose experiences and ideas become central to academic study. If one reads few, if any, works by writers of color . . . then "their" lives likely will remain marginal to "your" literary experience. Moreover, defining what is "central" and what is "marginal," a basic function of canonization, will itself help decide who studies, who teaches, and who has power in determining priorities in American colleges. (ix)

I want to suggest that, given this relationship—between the identification of cultural value in texts by women, African Americans, lesbians and gays, international writers of color, and the distribution of real power—there is little time to waste in literary speculation (Is the "new canon" here?) or postmodern playfulness (Do we really *want* a "new canon"?). The most substantive issue facing teachers, administrators, and critics within English Studies is the *success* of a new canon. And, given Lauter's formulation, success must mean permanence. Our goal must be to ensure that no future generation will have to struggle to have real democratic principles (i.e. those that respect difference and universality) centrally placed in conversations about cultural value. We will leave them to struggle with the specific aesthetic, political, and ethical questions that are central to a vital criticism, but they must be able to do so with the sense that their tradition affirms the presence of not only a diversity of texts, strategies, and ideologies, but most especially diversity within the staffing and control of educational institutions. The "new canon" is (and must be) a vehicle of understanding *and* social transformation.

Consistent with these goals, Nitza Hidalgo suggests that "before we can begin to understand others . . . we need to understand ourselves and what we bring to our interactions with others. For this reason, it is important for teachers interested in learning more about other cultural groups to first look inward" (99). While I do not disagree with this fundamental and healthy assumption, I wish to make an argument for a more comprehensive investigative practice, a practice I wish to call "radical introspection." To be sure, we do need self-knowledge, but we also need a consciousness that *to teach for a new canon is to engage in a dramatic transgression*. We transgress in that by "reform-ing" we seek to overturn the current distribution of power in the academy (which for many of us, like myself, is an assault on one's own class interest[2]) and to disavow previous constructions of cultural importance. Let us not soft sell the issue of "coverage" (or of the "meaning" of such coverage). A "new canon" means that some texts are not taught as often as others and that we recognize a need for curricular affirmative action.[3] Furthermore, an awareness of the transgressive nature of our decision to exercise our moral agency means that we must have a highly developed sense of our place in the web of institutional practices, personal goals and biases, student needs and desires, and national and international politics that make up our curriculum.

Literary critics and teachers of literature have much to learn from colleagues in colleges of education who have pioneered in the analysis of cultural and educational "texts" towards justice. I am especially influenced by the work of Michael Apple in this regard:

> Do not think of curriculum as a "thing," as a syllabus or a course of study. Instead, think of it as a symbolic, material, and human environment that is ongoingly reconstructed. This process of design involves not only the technical, but the aesthetic, ethical, and political if it is to be fully responsive at both the social and personal levels. (144; see also McCarthy 1990, 1993)

According to this thinking, the canon itself can become more than a list or collection of authorized texts. By recognizing "symbolic, material, and human environment[s]" as part of the process of canonization, we make obvious the need for a self-consciousness that is more than an awareness of text selection and syllabus construction. Ironically, within literary study (although less so within composition studies) we have tended to focus upon what Apple calls the *aesthetic*, and have been comfortable to ignore the "technical, ethical, and political." If we remain attached to a limited notion of the canon as *collection*, we risk an advocacy for change that is at best surface. Indeed, too much of the change that is slowly taking place is of the variety in which an instructor adds a text or two by a woman or African American and then has "done diversity." Teaching a new canon must involve a comprehensive revision of our pedagogical commitment and strategy.

Radical introspection, then, is a pedagogical starting point from which to approach changes to our standard procedures. Radical introspection must be understood as distinct from all forms of narcissism and psychological reductionism. In practice, my construction of radical introspection presents a challenge to consumerist and managerial notions of education and the social good.[4] I see it rooted in the liberal feminist notion of *the personal is political*, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's conception of the *organic intellectual*, and the African American tradition of prophetic Christianity.[5] As the above list suggests, radical introspection is both demanding and accessible. We have only to remind ourselves of the traditions of civil rights, student rebellion, and women's organizing, to initiate such a practice, even as we learn from their mistakes and failures. Radical introspection is at its base a challenging encounter with history.

Such an encounter with history will inevitably complicate even as it explains and clarifies. If we are moving towards or within a new canon we cannot become comfortable in such a space. Previously mentioned concerns about the "reality" of the new canon or about its desirability must be encountered from within a new set of cultural practices that situate teachers as negotiators and brokers. The use of the language of business is not meant to suggest a crassness or cynicism towards the humanities, but instead to reemphasize the necessarily pragmatic character of our approach towards history. This history is always present, and it consistently directs us to questions of answerability, obligation, and action. The new canon must become a dynamic concept, less interested in codification and more in transformation, less in pluralism and more in justice. We must admit to ourselves that the multicultural classroom and multicultural practice must be invented.

The goal of this essay is to suggest a map for radical introspection that might facilitate this invention. By *map* I mean not so much a prescription for change as a representation of the ground upon which the battle for educational transformation must be fought. It is a textual construction of that terrain, and we must interpret it, entering into dialogue about its validity and meaning. Like all maps, this one is inevitably imprecise and no substitute for the experience of the landscape. Maps provide clues to the paths we might choose in our exploration of the meaning of a cultural space, but they do not substitute for the necessary processes of translation and negotiation, and they can especially not provide a sophisticated historical consciousness. A map can provide only indirect pleasure. Radical introspection might be thought of as an ambitious search for the ephemeral pleasure of pedagogical comfort. It is the necessary attempt to understand necessary teaching locales; it is the redefinition of the literary survey.

To See and Teach Anew

Despite the attractiveness of the metaphor of mapping, it is unlikely that the experience of attempting to synthesize and internalize the following *locales* will represent any kind of satisfactory journey. The experience might even be overwhelming, a sensory overload, a suggestion of the impossibility of our task. Still, I believe that a sense of dislocation is exactly what our practice requires; we need to defamiliarize ourselves with the conventions of our teaching. To teach a new canon should mean to see and teach anew.

The first two points of reference to follow outline an interrogation of what it means to "profess" English; points three through seven suggest strategies for reconsidering the mechanics of our classroom practice; eight and nine attempt to describe our political responsibilities as educators in which English Studies is only one aspect of our professional situation.

1. A Literary Education?

The reevaluation of what we mean by English Studies has, of course, been a central part of the destabilization of the canon. Gerald Graff (1990), Terry Eagleton, and others have explored in theoretical and historical perspective the class, culture, and disciplinary commitments that have shaped the formation of the English department as we know it. Our increasing awareness of the Arnoldian suppositions about culture that have informed our understanding of a literary education has led to a reconsideration of our primary goals. In "teaching English" are we charged with the task of creating replicas of ourselves? Do we expect that our students' introduction to literature is or should be similar to our own? Should reconsideration of our goals (imparting an appreciation of the literary past or the pleasures of reading; providing an indirect civic education; or, more crassly, civilizing) mean an abandonment of our current pedagogical practices? This evaluation of goals seems especially necessary insofar as prior models based upon an introduction to high cultural icons have been intimately related to exclusionary practices and to limited conceptions of a democratic polity. Having identified this relationship, however, are we any closer to identifying the "proper" aims of a literary education? Two models that are useful for thinking through this evaluation of our understanding of a literary education are provided by Lisa Delpit and Gerald Graff. That the two models are somewhat incompatible is no matter. The tension between the two models suggests the complexity of the task facing us and the pragmatism and improvisation likely necessary if we are to proceed.

In her essay "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," Delpit argues that liberal educators who, in response to the interrogation of the past, enact a pedagogy of negotiation, consensus, and decentralized authority do an injustice to the needs of racially and economically marginalized students (1988). Such students, she argues, need to acquire basic literacy skills and achieve entry into *cultures of power*. Most important, she suggests, "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier." A new canon which is responsive to the changing face of United States culture is fine and good, yet it should not be an obstacle to the empowerment of students who seek concrete social mobility. The acknowledgment of a real power differential—one of our starting points—requires that we recognize that there may be no single most effective way to teach. Delpit suggests that "those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence." For teachers of literature in postsecondary education, mostly white men, this must mean a consciousness raising towards the construction of the *education in English* as a pragmatic and concrete enabling. Pedagogical responsibility means that we must take the practice of teaching functional and cultural literacies with utmost seriousness.[6]

Gerald Graff, in turn, suggests that we "teach the conflicts." The obvious and most intellectually credible way to acknowledge the *invented-ness* of our English Studies heritage, he says, is to present to students a model of the tradition which centers fragmentation, negotiation, plurality of interpretation, and democratic processes of consensus building. Graff directs his method towards *educational fundamentalists* who urge "the reorganization of the curriculum around a 'common culture' based on unitary truths and values" (1990, 51–67). Graff suggests this solution.

> Instead of trying to superimpose coherence from above, we should try to locate the principle of coherence in the cultural conversation itself in all its contentiousness. This would mean starting with what we already have, drawing on the potential coherence that is latent in the academic-intellectual conversation but that the disconnection of departments and courses has always obscured. "Starting with what we already have" would mean using recent conflicts over texts, canons, traditions, and ideologies—and the rich history of these conflicts—to make the curriculum less disconnected and help students make sense of their studies. (1990, 54)

Graff outlines the ways in which a literary education would become a series of effective juxtapositions (high culture vs. low culture, mainstream vs. margin, etc.) which facilitate the initiation of students into the history of the profession, and make possible their real participation in ongoing debates and disputes. Through team teaching, new course structures, and alternative educational settings like mini-conferences, students are introduced to a more accurate picture of our profession.

These are not meant to be exhaustive of the possibilities.[7] The comparison of the two models reveals to us the very diversity of institutional sites and occasions that make a quest for a single way of teaching the new canon problematic. Such a comparison reinforces the idea of canon as more than simply content. Furthermore, as the first model reveals to us the stakes involved in the adoption of a pedagogy, the second endorses a free and substantive encounter with the most pressing questions of our day. Delpit emerges in tension with Graff as she asserts that "liberal values" are pedagogically resonant with those clearly situated within the privileged mainstream. Can any real conversation take place if members of groups with significant interest in their outcome are not present in our institutions and especially not in positions of power, or if conversation partners lack basic literacy skills? Graff maintains that "English" has always been about negotiation and conversation and should continue to be so. Our responsibility is to be honest about our past and not shy away from conflict. Is there a direct relationship between *any* construction of a literary education and full access to "cultures of power"?

There is no easy reconciliation here. The message, I believe, in the reasonableness of each position is that teachers must become skilled readers of their own institutional locales and sensitive to the multiple needs of their students. A commitment to a literary education that is only skills-based inevitably becomes banal and likely fails because of the incompatibility of literary and vocational sensibilities. Similarly, a single-minded commitment to literary education that sees dialogue as a value uncompromised by social difference risks fetishizing and mythologizing the classroom. My suggestion is that all teachers who would want the new canon to be successful take time to discover what kind of model they (or their department) might be working with and whether or not that model is consistent with the goals and needs of their students. As we remake the canon, we must improvise a concept of an *education in literature*.

2. *Appropriation, Voyeurism, and the Privileged Self*

The impulse towards diversity is to be valued in all teachers. The decision to make changes to long held constructions of literary periods, surveys, introductions, and so on, is courageous and not uncomplicated. As contemporary ethnographers have learned, in our postcolonial and postmodern world the narration and interpretation of the stories of "others" cannot be attempted without a great deal of self-consciousness (Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986). The reshaping of the canon by individuals in particular institutional contexts is unlikely to be pursued without some self-interest. Part of the current receptiveness on the part of administrators is due to a kind of market research in which the changing university—more women and minorities—demands curricular change for "customer satisfaction." In that sense, it is imperative that we examine our motives, reveal our self-interest, and attempt to protect the integrity of those texts and traditions we choose to infuse into our current curriculum.

Ironically, our democratic urge is likely to generate some cultural dissonance. Even as we strive for consensus, utilize mosaic models, and dispense with melting pots, there will inevitably be conflict and misunderstanding. And the stakes are not small. For instance, there are specific questions to be asked about the cultural roots of the English classroom as we know it and the cultural character of new texts we might wish to bring there. In what ways is the gaze of the academy problematic, even colonial in orientation? Does a ghost dance song belong in the secular setting of our classrooms? In submitting the text to our New Critical toolbox do we risk repeating the cultural violence to which the text responded in the first place? As minority/marginal traditions develop in opposition to cultural hegemony, their introduction into the classrooms of mainstream institutions often carries with it the danger of co-optation, if not outright distortion. Typical of this process is the way in which texts that clearly designate or embrace complex cultural difference are transformed in the classroom into signs of universal human consciousness and values. In this mode, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* is shown to be "just like" the other great "I" texts of the mid-nineteenth-century American tradition, "just like" Whitman, Emerson, or Melville.

An interrogation of our desires and abilities to teach an extended canon inclusive of radical cultural diversity must lead to acknowledgment of the need for lifelong learning. In order that we might do justice to those very texts that we seek to include, we need to take time to learn about the specificity of the traditions from which they have emerged. Often, this learning may take the shape of *unlearning* ideas, structures, and theories about the ways we have come to understand literary history. The demands of this new canon might also require that we immerse ourselves in the philosophies and aesthetics of non-Western peoples.

It may also, of course, require the recognition of limits (Weixlmann 1988, Bacon 1993). For progressive teachers this is always a crucial struggle. How do we determine the appropriateness of a text in a classroom setting? Are we equipped as teachers to make those kinds of pre-judgments? How do we correlate the diversity of our classrooms (or its lack) and the diversity of our syllabi (or lack of it)? In what ways is our experience with the new canon predetermined by the kinds of diversity that exist in our classrooms? It is crucial that we seek out mentors, diverse individuals and groups, who can assist us in our quest for sensitivity and respect toward the literatures we wish to teach. In some sense we need to develop a critical attitude toward our own expertise, our own experience of the process of professionalization.

Understanding limits is an important step in ensuring the integrity of our pedagogy, as is *recognizing the privilege (and seriousness)* of reading, writing, and teaching. There is, of course, no small irony in the negotiation or establishment of cultural value of Native American or Asian American texts, for example, from within an academy which is largely absent of those voices.

3. *The Syllabus as Symbolic and Technical Document*

Gregory Jay has recently talked about utilizing the syllabus as a means of making obvious the kinds of choices we make as teachers in organizing, constructing, and shaping a course (Jay 1993). If I am attempting to provide for teachers a map towards a just multicultural practice, the syllabus must be our students' map towards a satisfactory experience of such a practice. By presenting the syllabus as an invention and not a document of unquestionable authority, we introduce students to the necessary choices we as teachers and critics always make. Part of our introspection must be a consideration of the relationship between our perceived authority (as text "experts") and the kinds of decentralization that we wish to take place.

Instead of simply listing texts available at the campus bookstore, why not list texts that might have been included but were not, along with a brief rationale for each choice? Instead of simply listing requirements, why not explain the pedagogical principle behind each choice? Instead of a reductive boilerplate which presents a period, theme, or genre as permanent or natural, suggest for students the kinds of conversations that have taken place to formulate this particular course "package." Of course, part of the argument of this essay is that we do not "reveal the works" because we are largely unaware of them ourselves. The syllabus can then be shaped in such a way that it becomes an illustration of the kinds of sites/sights revealed by the map I am sketching here. The general issue here is not so much syllabus construction in particular, but rather the ways in which we present ourselves and our task to students. Thoughtfully constructed, the syllabus can indicate to students our desire to be (co)learners in the classroom. If one goal of canonical reform is to destabilize cultural authority, our own authority as teachers—and in this case, as writers, creators of texts—must also be part of the agenda. There is no more effective way to introduce students to this principle than to suggest to students that there is a negotiation into which they are being invited, or, better still, the insistence that the negotiation itself is the subject.[8]

4. Writing as Skill and Inquiry

The search for student-centered classroom activities must be a diligent one if the success of the new canon is to be a reality. Fundamentally, we must search for an intersection between the discourses of composition and literary theory. For if the new canon is to be associated with the cultivation of an awareness of its own invention, we must subsequently recognize the need to allow students to participate in that process of discovery. It is perhaps too strong to suggest that a model of the classroom based upon lecture is always inappropriate (see discussion of "contexts for meaning" below) but it is fair to suggest that students do become aware of the irony inherent in a model of education in which they are *told* about the value of dialogue and negotiation and not allowed to participate in the process. The most effective foregrounding of the process is to ensure that multiple forms of writing be given a central place in the literature classroom. The sense of ownership that students feel in these kinds of classroom situations ensures that they will become enthusiastic spokespersons for the practice and for the new canon as content (see Moreland and Primeau in this volume).

Students need to be provided with open-ended opportunities to investigate the presuppositions of the course. A dialogue must be secured that utilizes the talents and perspectives of the text, the instructor, and peers. We need to look beyond the all too frequent pattern of analysis, essay, essay exam in the structuring of writing in our classrooms. This is our real opportunity to do justice to Lisa Delpit's concerns about providing students access to cultures of power. It is fine and good to encourage dialogue within the classroom, but it is much more provocative to prepare students to engage in similar kinds of conversations in extra-curricular fashion. Given the centrality of writing in our own scholarship, as teachers we have been surprisingly lacking in creativity in the use of writing in the literature classroom. Diversity should be as much our guide here as in the construction of the reading list. Opportunities for collaborative writing, for instance, can be crucial exercises in consensus building and an indirect skills education.

5. Evaluation and Power

The most complicated site for our critical pedagogical practice is the grade. For many of us, the practice of evaluation infinitely complicates the practice of decentralizing authority in the classroom. The risk of perceived inconsistency, if not hypocrisy, seems great. If one spends a semester detailing the ways in which the establishment of cultural value is ideologically motivated, imperfect, and intimately related to the hegemony of dominant class interests, how do or should students receive the practice of grading? It is at this moment that we find ourselves as teachers most aware of the contradictions of our efforts at change or reform. For the university does have an interest in establishing cultural value and the process of accreditation or certification becomes, at some level, a reflection of how well we perceive students to have come to embody the values of the bureaucratic structure. As the punitive subtext of disciplinary mastery (or lack or rejection of it) is revealed, the complexity of the task of empowering is made clear.

While it might seem a troubling and frightening dead end, we can continue the self-criticism and openness established in our new syllabus towards a truce with the grade. How do we create a significance for the practice of grading beyond a kind of gatekeeping that reproduces the current social order? In a real way, the task given to us by universities is to discriminate. I would argue that the value of multiplicity and the practice of revision as encoded in the establishment of the new canon themselves suggest strategies and techniques for the negotiation of the grade. Beyond the cliché of multiple literacies lies the useful principle of providing students with multiple opportunities of differing kind to succeed. Similarly, if we are to argue that our own ideas (as teachers and scholars) are the products of revision, an ongoing dialectic, similar opportunity should be offered to our students, especially, Lisa Delpit might suggest, as they struggle to learn the rules of the game.

I must admit that the arbitrariness or radical subjectivity of the grade is extremely troubling to me. The syllabus again seems a useful tool in this regard, an opportunity to write to students about this dilemma. At a minimum, if conversation is to be a centrally held value, it needs to be introduced at some level into this process. I have found open conversations with students about their perception of grading and their own individual performance in class to be extremely helpful as I attempt to draw distinctions and transform the role of gatekeeper. There is, however, little comfort to be found here, and I believe it is imperative that we all "theorize" our relationship to this process towards new possibilities for the meaning of the grade.

6. Contexts for Meaning

The issue of how to frame a new canon is crucial. Do we work within old categories, or do we need to start all over? Gregory Jay has been most provocative in this regard:

> It is time to stop teaching "American" literature. The combined lessons of critical theory, classroom practice, and contemporary history dictate not only a revision of the curriculum and pedagogy of "American" literature courses, but a forceful uprooting of the conceptual model defining the field itself . . . On the one hand this means affirming the reforms that have taken hold at numerous institutions and in a number of new critical studies and anthologies . . . On the other hand it means pointing out that many of these reforms have only been pluralist in character . . . That scholarship thus continues to rely upon, and reproduce, the oppressive nationalist ideology which is the nightmare side of the "American dream." Our goal should be rather to construct a multicultural and dialogical paradigm for the study of writing in the United States. (1993, 264)

I find this argument compelling as a charge to radically rethink *all* of our period courses which rely upon nationalist (or imperialist or colonial) conceptualizations. My reservations would again emerge from Lisa Delpit-like objections. By proactively abandoning these constructions, do we short-change students outside of cultures of power who might need a "periodization literacy" to succeed at higher level literary study? Of course, the history of the story of a periodization can be (or should be) taught in the course of its deconstruction or disavowal.[9]

But the reconsideration of course rubrics may not be the only frames that need reevaluation. For instance, the ways in which we present intertextual relationships may need to be revised according to the insights gained by canonical reorganization. Toni Morrison's challenge that we profoundly acknowledge the "Africanist" presence in American literature, or Shelley Fisher Fishkin's exploration of the cultural roots of Huck Finn, suggest strategies here. The challenge is to create an openness in students to the complex kinds of syncretism that literature utilizes and produces and to suggest reading (or a literary "instinct") as useful in negotiating our complex multicultural environment. The old ways of doing/seeing things are just that; from the past, they are based upon a practice of invention that served the social, aesthetic, and cultural needs of a particular place and time.

As teachers within a new canon, we may find that our most demanding task is to make available to students contextual materials that will aid their negotiation of textual meaning. As we cannot assume that students have had, say, an adequate preparation in Native American cosmology, we find ourselves engaged in a process of providing, explaining, sharing a variety of preliminary knowledges. (I admit here that we cannot assume that our students come to us with significant background in the nuts and bolts of a Western

Christian worldview either.) This need not necessarily—although it might—mean a retreat to the lecture. Given the issues previously raised about cultural appropriation and voyeurism, however, it does seem necessary that significant effort be given over to ensuring that our interpretations are thick ones. Teachers can become partners with their students in this education. Individual students or small groups can be charged with the task of researching cultural context, and discovered sources can be subjected to the same process of dialogue and interpretation as primary texts. Again, rather than a burden, this task can be a means of retaining the creative tension between the Delpit and Graff models. Students can learn valuable skills in research, even as they participate in a process of enriching group conversation and working to foreground its success.

7. The Student/Teacher Relationship

As another extension of the Delpit–Graff axis, I would suggest that a substantive mentoring must be a part of our pedagogical commitment to a new canon. Consistent with Delpit, we must take the responsibility to ensure that our students receive the kind of instruction in writing that will help them achieve professional and personal goals. We must inform them about academic convention, and engage them in a productive dialogue about their academic goals. Consistent with Graff, we must make our students into *teachers of the conflicts*, which will inevitably mean a kind of civic education and encourage them to become life-long learners. Such a transformation is not possible without substantive knowledge of student fears, needs, and desires. This relationship is doubly important in making possible the success of women and minority students. Given the ways in which many of these students find the culture of the academy alienating, if not hostile, it is crucial that we assure them of our support for their individual goals, ensure that they have all the institutional knowledges necessary for success, and signal our respect for their intellectual capabilities. Mentoring thus becomes a central task in canonical reform.

While perhaps romantic, I believe that a central part of our work towards the success of a new canon must be a resistance against the further introduction of managerial attitudes into the shaping of our classrooms. We must be willing to struggle for reasonable student-teacher ratios so that our stated goals are possible. It is, perhaps, understatement to suggest that a new canon must bring a new respect for the agency and intellect of our students generally. While I am in danger here of slipping into a utopian mode I have been struggling to avoid, I would add that a part of our pedagogical introspection must be a consideration of our own interpersonal skills so that we do give students the *experience* of a new canon that is respectful, challenging, and compelling.

8. Institutional Perspective

How does the revision of a single course affect the presentation of the department's view of English Studies? Are student experiences of courses influenced by a new canon affirming and empowering, or is the dissonance between the revised course and other departmental offerings alienating and confusing? The uncomfortable but necessary demand here is that teachers cannot be content only to make crucial changes to one's own classes, but must take an active interest in the reform of departments as a whole. This is traditionally dangerous territory as it means directing ourselves to the practices (usually off limits) of our colleagues. Indeed, we may find it necessary to participate in (or *instigate*) conversations about curriculum across our campuses. At a minimum we need to become evangelists for the kind of new canonical pragmatism that I am trying to map here.

I am increasingly convinced that the kinds of success that I have been suggesting can only be achieved when other areas of the university experience the same kind of canonical crisis experienced by language and literature studies. One of the difficulties we invite when we sketch a map like this is that we allow the university community to believe that somehow the work of change is exclusively the domain of English Studies or perhaps the humanities generally. A central part of our introspection must be a move towards demanding a commitment to change throughout the university.

9. On Political Responsibility

A fundamental premise of this map is that teaching—especially teaching about diversity to a diversity—is privilege. Like all privileges it suggests responsibilities even beyond those institutional ones suggested above. We must begin to think about the ways in which the success of a new canon can only be ensured by our active participation in local, national, and international conversations about race, gender, sexuality, and their place in all institutions. Organizations like the Union of Democratic Intellectuals or Teachers for a Democratic Culture have a significant track record in advocacy for the permanence of the changes that a new canon would suggest. We need to think about ways to confront the misrepresentation of changes we are trying to institute.

My epigram might be helpful in this regard. As an alternative to skepticism or cynicism, Gramsci proposes "pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will," recognizing that nothing will be easy, realizing the necessity of articulating specific means towards an end. "It is," he argues, "necessary to direct one's attention violently towards the present as it is, if one wishes to transform it" (175). I have been trying to suggest the necessity of this kind of substantive and comprehensive encounter with our situation if we are to have any hope of success.

There is little question about the difficulty here. My map suggests a demanding terrain. All teachers will inevitably be insightful and effective at certain *locales* and less so at others. And, the locales suggested here are by no means exhaustive of the likely places we will need to stop and think. The juggling act we must undertake is and should be the most arduous part of our lives as "professors" of literature. The danger here has been the construction of an essay that has had by necessity to be plodding. I would argue, in defense, that a self-consciousness about this map is, I believe, a great deal of the battle.

Toward a Just and Effective Practice

Recent collections of essays which have addressed the general question of change in English Studies have talked about theory and the theoretical implications of change without paying significant attention to the nuts and bolts of classroom practice.[10] It is my assertion here that without a profoundly pragmatic (in all the senses of the word) approach to canonical change, and, at some level, to writing about canonical change, we risk missing an important historic opportunity. We need to evaluate the conditions of our locale and seek out a practice that concretely serves the needs of students as we pursue our hopes for a substantive and challenging conversation. There is little need for utopianism. It is crucial that we work to discover the specifics of a just and effective practice that serves the goal of permanence. We need less self-congratulation, more self-investigation.

Notes

1. The *we* used in this sentence—and throughout the paper—is not meant to suggest that I am speaking for all or any contributors to this book. I use the *we* to refer to an imagined community of teachers interested in the

success of a "new canon" as I have articulated it. The *we*, then, is not used without some sense of irony. I am interested in using the collective pronoun as a means of suggesting necessary consensus on certain fundamental ethical issues while at the same time keeping to the descriptive tone of this book as a whole. The *we* may be suggestively Whitmanesque, but is likely, too, a fiction, and in no way should indicate that the ideas in the essay are the responsibility of anyone but the writer.

2. See Joseph S. Murphy's important article "Some Thoughts About Class, Caste, and the Canon" on the complex relationship between canonical change, class interest, and changes in attitudes towards work.

3. In his important article "The End of 'American' Literature: Towards a Multicultural Practice," Gregory Jay writes (and quotes Annette Kolodny), "I could go on writing about Hawthorne or James or Eliot, but that, I think, would be irresponsible. It would also be less difficult and less interesting than meeting the ethical challenge to undertake what Kolodny describes as a 'heroic rereading' of those uncanonized works 'with which we are least familiar, and especially so when they challenge current notions of art and artifice.' Armed with the criticism and scholarship of the past twenty years, revisionists should 'immerse themselves in the texts that were never taught in graduate school—*to the exclusion of works with which they had previously been taught to feel comfortable and competent*'" (302).

4. I am thinking here of the kinds of challenges raised by Robert Bellah, et al., in *Habits of the Heart* or in the ongoing cultural critique of Christopher Lasch. The point is that radical introspection is a practice meant to alert teacher/critics to the ways in which they are reliant upon, indebted to, and responsible within a number of different communities. Radical introspection is a challenge to individualism or individualist constructions of pedagogy. The goal is insight towards social action.

5. See Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*.

6. Delpit adds, however, that this is not a retreat to skills against process: "In conclusion, I am proposing a resolution for the skills/process debate. In short, the debate is fallacious; the dichotomy is false. The issue is really an illusion created initially not by teachers but by academics whose world view demands the creation of categorical divisions—not for the purpose of better teaching, but for the goal of easier analysis. As I have been reminded by many teachers . . . those who are most skillful at educating Black and poor children do not allow themselves to be placed in 'skills' or 'process' boxes. They understand the need for both approaches, the need to help students to establish their own voices, but to coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society" (296).

7. Nor is it meant to be an uncomplicated endorsement of either model. While I admire both, and see real possibilities in a reading of the tension between the two, I am uncomfortable with Delpit's construction of racial identity and lack of an explanation for the relationship between "cultural codes" and access to power. Similarly, in Graff I am uncomfortable with the model's close relationship to elite kinds of literary education, where in either a "fundamentalist" or "teach the conflicts" mode, the setting is not a lecture hall of up to two hundred students or a teacher with a course load of four courses per semester.

8. I would also add that the perceived contractual authority of the syllabus is effective in communicating to students the seriousness of the negotiation. By using the syllabus as a touchstone and treating it as any other text in the class—requiring interpretation and close reading—we also provide our students the possibility of some coherence that often seems lost when we violate comfortable conventions of genre, period, canonical status, and so on.

9. The same goes for genre courses. It seems to me equally important that we reveal fiction, poetry and drama as largely Western cultural innovations and not natural categories. The necessity of this becomes immediately clear to anyone who attempts to teach a non-Western literature while desperately grasping to their own education in genres, themes, periods, etc. A course in the African novel is, of course, feasible, but a credible effort would need to explore the relationship between orality, language, and colonialism in a substantive way, so that the very category of *novel* becomes problematic.

10. For example: G. Douglass Atkins and Michael L. Johnson, *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*; James M. Calahan and David B. Downing, eds., *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses*; Bruce Henricksen and Thais E. Morgan, eds., *Reorientations: Critical Theories and Pedagogies*; Maria-Regina Kecht, ed., *Pedagogy is Politics: Literary Theory and Critical Teaching*; Cary Nelson, ed., *Theory in the Classroom*; and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and David Morton, *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics*. I don't want to overstate the critique here. The very emergence of a significant body of literature devoted to pedagogy in search of a revision of the ways in which we currently conceptualize "English" is exciting. My concern is that theory constantly displaces concrete discussion of necessary steps towards the success of our efforts. Two recent books provocative in another direction (but not oriented to English or higher education) are Kathleen Casey's *I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working for Social Change* and *Freedom's Plow: Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom*, edited by Theresa Perry and James W. Fraser.

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2 "Who Are All These People?": Some Pedagogical Implications of Diversity in the Multicultural Literature Classroom

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Students step into college classrooms with diverse experiences, values, and attitudes. Race, ethnicity, and gender are only the most obvious differences that contribute to classroom demographics. Even in seemingly homogeneous classrooms—whether all white or all of color, all men or all women—students differ in many ways: age, sexual orientation, social class and the corresponding degree of financial security and self support, religious background, political affiliation, family history, family responsibilities, academic preparation, emotionally charged experiences regarding race, sexuality, and education, hours working outside of academics, and current course load can directly affect their performance. Such differences complicate teachers' attempts at identifying why some students succeed and others do not, why certain methods work (sometimes) and others fail, and why a given text may fascinate one group of students and leave another group frustrated and bored.

Given the time demands on teachers' professional lives, there is a limit to how much attention instructors can give to the unique qualities of each student. However, recent research offers a mosaic of student descriptions regarding such crucial issues as learning and communication styles and attitudes about education, all of which have pedagogical implications. What follows is a brief description of some of these educationally significant differences that students bring to the college classroom.

Differences in Learning and Communication Styles

As more teachers of literature attempt to create classrooms where real discussion, debate, and negotiation in the construction of textual meaning can take place, they are meeting a variety of challenges which arise out of student differences and forms of student resistance. Cross-cultural differences in learning and communication styles may be the most influential factor in student success or failure.[1] When student style conflicts with teacher expectations, many students confront a learning environment that violates their cultural norms. Linda Marchesani and Maurianne Adams suggest that "traditionally sanctioned individual performance, reasoned argumentation, impersonal objectivity, and sports-like competitiveness represent a distinct set of cultural norms and values" (1992, 12). While many white, middle-class males may feel comfortable within such classrooms, other students are faced with the dilemma of either discarding their cultural notions of educational social relations or being harshly judged by these traditional standards of classroom performance.

Women and students from a working-class background may face just such difficulties. In a study on the learning and communication style preferences of men and women, Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler find that many men are content-oriented and are interested in establishing conversational hierarchies through debate. As one of her male subjects reported, "[I enjoy classes when] I attack the teacher's ideas and the teacher attacks mine, without any sense of ill feeling" (1990, 51). Many women, on the other hand,

> are more interested than men in talking to support friends, and in spirited shared discussion; they also feel more at ease with teachers who do not impose their views on others. . . . They consider the openness and supportiveness of the instructor the salient factor in determining whether they feel comfortable talking in class and give more importance than do men to the teacher's attempts to insure that class members feel good about each other. (54)

In one sense, these students reveal a conflict between the values of individualism and community. While neither orientation is superior to the other, instructors' teaching styles and performance expectations have traditionally privileged the individual competitor and disadvantaged those concerned for the well-being of the group.

Such differences and discriminations can be found in other forms of academic communication. In a study of gender bias in written comments on student writing, Linda Laube Barnes notes that women writers, in their desire to create relational bonds with their readers, use the pronoun *I* 50 percent more often than men and use the pronoun *you* 200 percent more often. Many women also seem uncomfortable, if not unwilling, to assume positions of objective authority in their writing (1990, 141). After examining the generally negative teacher comments in response to papers written by such women, Barnes concluded that they pay a price for embracing what appears to be a set of gendered rhetorical strategies. In other words, the academic discourse of choice is decidedly aggressive, "objective," and implicitly individualistic.

Working-class students may be disadvantaged in a similar way. Lowry Hemphill notes that "middle-class children and adolescents have grown up in families who value the ability to floor-hold in conversation and construct monologues unsupported by listener response." On the other hand,

> [W]orking-class children and adolescents may have had not only less out-of-school experience with these styles, but may be accustomed in addition to another style, one that values collaborative topic development and elaboration in the role of listener. . . . Thus, working-class children may not only appear less competent to their teachers, they may also experience school as a place where oral language skills, as they understand them, are not valued. (703)

Again collaborative, community-centered discourse conflicts with traditional teaching methods. These two studies suggest that women and working-class students might immediately benefit from a shift from individualistic, teacher-centered instruction to cooperative student-centered instruction.

On the other hand, a more radical pedagogy, with its implicit valuing of cooperative learning, the sharing of authority, and the embrace of multiple perspectives, may also cause many students a great deal of cross-cultural discomfort.

Students who have been raised in an environment where successful literacy events are defined by public performance[2] may view the "nonperforming" teacher as lazy or incompetent and not worth modeling. Along these lines, Lisa Delpit has suggested that African American students feel (and often are) educationally short-changed by teachers who rely too heavily on cooperative learning, leaving students to teach themselves, while the teachers fail to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and authority which students need to learn (280–98). While Delpit is referring to students younger than those whom college teachers encounter, it may be reasonable to assume that such preferred learning styles and attitudes carry over into the college literature classroom, only to be misinterpreted as hostility, resistance, and/or lack of ability. Thus, in some instances, a teacher-centered, competitive, hierarchical classroom may be appropriate.

Interpreting communication styles across cultures is difficult, and we must be careful when making pedagogical decisions based on cultural concerns because the apparent educational needs of students can be contradictory. For example, in many Chinese American families, conversational exchanges are controlled by parents. "Parents initiate conversation with children, ask them factual questions, talk about steps they are following as they go about the tasks, and monitor their children's talk and activities through verbal correction, explication, and evaluation" (Heath 1992, 113). Note how closely such language interaction parallels the traditional lecture/recitation model of schooling. Now imagine the difficulty such a student may have with a teacher who wants to decenter classroom authority by requiring students to control conversation while the instructor is present. The perceived disrespect inherent in such a learning situation would likely inhibit student performance. However, many Asian American students appear to be caught in a double bind. While they may have difficulty with the progressive teacher's sharing of authority, Marchesani and Adams point out that many such students have also been socialized to affirm modesty, cooperation, and non-assertiveness in their family and community (1992, 12). Thus, the traditional classroom environment of teacher-directed, assertive individualism would also challenge the student's cultural values.

To make matters even more problematic, the culturally based learning and communication styles of recent immigrants of a given group may no longer be shared by those whose family history in the United States dates back several generations. For example, when teaching an Asian American Studies course, K. Scott Wong expected his Asian American students to take the course "in order to claim, with pride, their identity as Asian Americans." Instead, he discovered students who were the sons and daughters of doctors and lawyers and raised in the affluent suburbs of Detroit, who "did not readily identify with an Asian American community. In fact, a trip to China town would have been as new to them as it might have been for many of their white classmates" (88–89). In terms of learning and communication style, such students have far more in common with middle-class white students than with Asian American peers of more recent arrival.

While teachers may be tempted to throw up their hands and ignore this confusion of learning and communication style preferences, such a response seriously jeopardizes some students' academic achievement and calls into question the validity of any assessment

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teachers make regarding the speech acts and written work of such students. Mismatched conceptions of appropriate classroom performance often result in teachers giving poor evaluations to students forced to cross cultures. As mentioned earlier, instructors (male and female) responded negatively to the gendered rhetorical strategies used by many women. Similarly, Robert Powell and Mary Jane Collier, who studied the connections between student culture and student assessment in the basic speech course at California State University, Los Angeles, found that "White students received significantly higher oral performance scores than Latino, Asian, and African American students" (242–3). Accent, pronunciation, lexical diversity, eye contact, and expressiveness were factors that may have contributed to negative responses from evaluators.

How informal oral performance (and written performance) of bicultural students is perceived by literature teachers has yet to be studied adequately; however, I suspect that similar biases pervade most departments, including English. Thus, to ignore cultural differences in learning and communication style means to consciously disadvantage many students. If possible, these differences need to be recognized by both teachers and students, and negotiations need to take place regarding expected performance on behalf of the students and instructors. In other words, some questions need to be explicitly addressed: Under what conditions will non-traditional academic discourse be accepted? What methods will the teacher use to help the student approximate more traditional academic discourse and performance?

Resistance

Given the cross-cultural confusion generated by mismatched learning, communication, and teaching styles, there is little wonder why many students, consciously or unconsciously, resist the goals of the literature teacher. Some student attitudes which inhibit the academic objectives that teachers hope to achieve are common across cultural boundaries and arise out of experiences with public schools. In his book on hostility in the classroom, James Marshall points out that

> [a] pervasive element in our schools (and American schools are not unique in this) is their autocratic, undemocratic nature, from classroom to top administration. Autocracy may arouse hostility or subservience. The one is disruptive, the other deadening. Both tend to block the realization of capacities to learn and teach, to inquire and create. (11)

To a large degree, the hostility that some public school teachers encounter in their students is either muted or diffused in the college classroom. The tendency toward subservience, passivity, and silence are, however, quite prevalent. In fact, so little debate, discussion, and collaborative work take place in most public school classrooms, that first-year college students are unprepared for and suspicious of the learning demands made on them in many college literature classes.

Patricia Kearney and Timothy Plax estimate that "In a typical classroom of approximately thirty students, we can expect five or six of them to avoid or otherwise resist doing something that the teacher wants them to do" (85). Such resistance can range from the passive decision not to complete assignments to the aggressive choice to openly challenge teacher authority. In this sense, radical pedagogies have not adequately addressed the existence (and irony) of much student resistance. Those who claim that students are powerless in the face of institutional authority ignore the very real interpersonal struggles which occur in classrooms on a daily basis. As Kearney and Plax insist,

> To presume that teachers have power and students do not is the first and biggest mistake teachers can make in their efforts to control students. All new teachers, at least those that survive, soon learn that power is relational. (98–9)

Being aware of students' resistance strategies can help teachers take a more constructive role in helping such students succeed in spite of their attitudes. Many times such resistance originates out of discomfort students feel in adjusting to the learning and communication styles of college professors.

Breaking students of the habits of passivity requires teaching the skills of active participation, small group discussion leadership, and public debate and negotiation, *regardless of whether such skills should have been taught to them before they reach college.* However, the specialization of course offerings at universities and colleges inhibits any concerted effort at addressing this problem. Despite the best intentions, it is unlikely that students will make coherent sense and application out of the hit-and-miss chaos of most college core curricula. The disciplinary mindset that insists that communication skills be taught in the speech class, writing in the composition class, and literature in the literature class generally results in fragmented and inadequate instruction in the interpersonal skills required for the classroom.

Other resistant attitudes may arise out of cultural differences. In his studies of students of color in public schools, John Ogbu has pointed out that voluntary immigrant groups (i.e., Korean Americans, Japanese Americans, Caribbean African Americans) and involuntary immigrant groups (i.e., Native Americans, African Americans, and Chicanos) can vary significantly in their attitudes toward education. Voluntary immigrants often embrace education and the appropriation of Standard English as the quickest means to economic success. In general, they

> have cultural models that lead them to accept uncritically mainstream folk theory and strategies of getting ahead in the United States and to interpret their economic hardships as temporary problems they can and will overcome through education and hard work. . . . [and] these voluntary minorities do make concerted efforts to overcome the cultural and language barriers they experience in school and mainstream society. (291)

On the other hand, many students from involuntary immigrant groups have "oppositional cultural language frames of reference" and

> do not define cultural or language differences they encounter in society and school as barriers to be overcome, but as markers of identity to be maintained. For these minorities, there is a "White way" and a "minority way" of talking and behaving. (289)

More specific to the teaching of literature, many cultures (particularly those with predominantly working-class backgrounds) view literature as an effeminate luxury that is especially unsuitable for boys and young men. In his article, "Where Are the Italian-American Novelists?" Gay Talese answers his own question by pointing out that "Even those Italian-Americans whose parents were born in the United States grew up most often in homes without books, or with very few books" (25). He points out that Gerald Marzorati, deputy editor of *Harper's Magazine*, felt that "most of his male classmates regarded reading as 'effeminate'" and that "whenever a teacher read aloud from Shakespeare or another poet, he remembers trying to conceal his interest not wanting to be perceived as different—more studious—than his macho contemporaries" (29). With these attitudes in mind, we can be sure that, despite any racially and ethnically inclusive reading list, many students will likely bring an oppositional stance to the college literature class, complicating the already problematic nature of teacher authority, particularly for white, middle-class teachers in the multicultural classroom.

Another source of resistance can be found in students' inexperience in thinking, discussing, and writing about issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Given the persistence of censorship challenges and the general public's suspicion of "moral education," public school teachers cannot be faulted for focusing on safer themes and issues. This presents a problem for college students and instructors because publicly discussing an issue such as race and racism can be emotionally harrowing and rhetorically difficult, and it requires some preparation and practice.

By and large, college students are unprepared for such a challenge and meet attempts at open dialogue with silence or confrontation. Beverly Tatum suggests that the following attitudes underlie this resistance:

1. Race is considered a taboo topic for discussion, especially in racially mixed settings.
2. Many students, regardless of racial group membership, have been socialized to think of the United States as a just society.
3. Many students, particularly white students, initially deny any personal prejudice, recognizing the impact of racism on other people's lives, but failing to acknowledge its impact on their own. (5)

In general, such students are captives of stereotypical thinking which prevents them from open exploration of issues and ideas. They are particularly susceptible to what Gail Gehrig calls "intolerance triggers" such as master stereotypes like "welfare recipient" or polarizing issues such as "affirmative action" (62). Upon hearing such terms, students often respond emotionally, negatively, repeating cliché criticisms derived from their limited conversational experiences regarding race, gender, or sexual orientation. Many students bring an utter lack of experience in listening to or participating in intelligent discussions regarding such emotional social issues and, thus, are unprepared for the unique conversational demands of the cross-cultural literature class.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural literature classroom is a site of dynamic social exchange fraught with potential for conflict and misunderstanding between teachers and students. In addition, the differences that students bring to class make communication among themselves a unique and difficult challenge. For the first time, many students will discuss and negotiate beliefs and attitudes which are foreign and even hostile to their own. The disruption of uncertainty, which follows exposure to multiple perspectives, only contributes to the discomfort that many students feel. Given the inherent challenging of value systems that often accompanies an exploration of multicultural literature, the necessity of learning how to transgress one's own cultural boundaries goes beyond the interaction between student and student or student and teacher. The authors, narrators, and characters of these texts are, to paraphrase Wayne Booth, friends (or not) who have been invited to the class salon. Students must learn to hear them and debate with them as surely as they do with fellow students and the professor. It is a difficult challenge and is made all the more intense given the accompanying power relations—teachers wielding grades, students evaluating instructor performance—which may have direct impact on the careers of all involved.

Yet, the potential for learning in ways that extend beyond the traditional notion of a literature curriculum, learning that has direct implications for students' responsible performance as citizens in a diverse democratic society, makes the challenges of the cross-cultural classroom worthwhile. With a little foreknowledge, patience, and a genuine curiosity about the ways different people think, speak, and write, teachers and students can transform the diverse classroom into a rigorous, novel, and exciting learning experience for all involved.

Notes

1. I am defining a culture as a set of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, notions of history, and meaningful symbols that are generally but not absolutely shared by the members of a community. As such, a culture can arise from a community defined by race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and other factors. Given that most individuals are simultaneous members in several communities and often reject the cultural values of the communities to which they seemingly belong, subsequent descriptions of various groups are problematic in their generalizations. Nevertheless, such descriptions can be useful in understanding the complexity of social dynamics in the cross-cultural classroom.

2. See Shirley Brice Heath's pivotal text, *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (1983, New York, Cambridge University Press) which explores the close association between public performance and literacy in a working-class, African American community.

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3 Race and Representation: Students of Color in the Multicultural Classroom

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Introduction

The last twenty years have witnessed a national movement for curricular change in an attempt to produce more representative accounts of society by including the experiences of those previously excluded (Anderson 1988; Hartung 1991; Smith 1982). Responding to the criticism made by feminists, minority scholars, and students that the traditional curriculum was based on white males' experience and taught from an ethnocentric male perspective, many colleges have expanded the curriculum to include programs such as African American studies, ethnic studies, and women's studies. While the addition of these specialized programs provided alternative and challenging perspectives, "these new bodies of scholarship were on the periphery, functioning as ghettos serving mainly small and self-selective groups of students" (Morgen 1986, 2). Today many scholars have recognized the need to mainstream diverse and alternative perspectives into the broader curriculum so that all students can benefit. The ongoing incorporation of multicultural and feminist curriculum has sparked a great deal of research and debate regarding the benefits and costs of various methods of integration (Chow 1985).

While curriculum integration is obviously necessary in order to incorporate minority and female perspectives into the otherwise white and male dominated academy, simply adding new perspectives can potentially raise new problems. Bohmer and Briggs have suggested that incorporating race, class, and gender into the curriculum creates particular problems for some students. They have found that "students from privileged class and race backgrounds are frequently hostile, or at best neutral, to presentations on race, class, and gender stratification; often they respond with guilt, anger, or resistance" (154).

While researchers and teachers are beginning to grapple with problems which arise when teaching privileged white male students about gender and racial oppression, it is often assumed that the needs of female and minority students have been met merely by the addition of race and gender inclusive material. Incorporating multicultural curriculum can, however, create unique problems for women and students of color.

We would like to expand the discussion of curriculum integration by addressing the difficulties of achieving a race inclusive curriculum in a way that empowers students of color.[1] While curriculum integration is an important goal, we believe that truly inclusive curriculum cannot be achieved simply by adding new perspectives. Educators "also need to raise important questions regarding the relationship between knowledge and power . . . This is essentially a question of not only what people know but also how they come to know in a particular way within the contexts and constraints of specific social and cultural practices" (Giroux and Trend 1992, 63–4). If curriculum integration is to fulfill its liberatory goals, we must also address structural and ideological features which shape and constrain the learning process. Our research addresses various factors which shape the experiences of students of color in the multicultural classroom. Specifically, we address ideologies of rationality and emotion, legitimacy and authority, and representation and identity, which shape the power dynamics within the multicultural classroom.

Methods

This research grew out of our teaching experiences at a predominantly white university. While we were teaching a course in which race and gender were central in the curriculum, several students voiced their concerns and feelings about their experiences at the university. Students discussed issues ranging from their emotional reactions to the curriculum to the lack of diversity within the university. Informed and encouraged by our students, we employed participant observation and recorded life stories in our research. We refer to discussions with students as life stories rather than interviews because they were unstructured and consisted of few directed questions. We have relied upon two sets of life stories; the first set includes the stories of undergraduate women of color. We met with these women individually and recorded their stories pertaining to their experiences in higher education. We initially began by recording the stories of students who came to us with their concerns. We asked these students to discuss our work with classmates and friends, encouraging others who had similar experiences to contact us. The second set of life stories is part of a larger research project exploring the experiences of students of color at the University of Oregon.[2]

This paper draws upon the life stories of eighteen students of color, twelve female and six male. Students identified their racial/ethnic backgrounds as follows: six African Americans, four Chicanos, three Native Americans, three Asian American/Pacific Islanders, and two of mixed-race heritage. In addition to recording life stories, we engaged in participant observation and drew upon our experiences as teaching assistants and instructors at the University of Oregon over a four-year period.

Emotion Work and Race Inclusive Curriculum

While some researchers have begun to recognize and explore the effects of race inclusive curriculum on white students (Bohmer and Briggs 1991; Carby 1992; Scritchfield 1993), few have begun to consider its impact on students of color (Foote 1993). The students of color we interviewed felt that race inclusive curriculum held a different meaning for them than for white students and required a different kind of attention and work than their other courses.

Louise, an African American woman, described her strong emotional reaction to a class in which race and gender were central to the curriculum. Not only were the films on students of color's histories difficult for her to watch without experiencing feelings of anger and depression, but she felt,

> You can't watch or read anything from this class without having some kind of emotion tied to it. You just can't.

Another woman of color, Mary, explained the emotional strain she experienced when reading about the experiences of women of color throughout U.S. history:

> This class was so hard for me because it dealt with me. It was like I had a lot of anger and a lot of tears.

Still other students explained how reading inclusive material required more time of them than other students and other classes because it was so emotionally draining. Martha explained,

> The reading was hard for me, all of it was hard. I remember the first readings were on American Indians. And I just cried. Because both of my great grandmothers were Native American. It really hurt. Sometimes the truth hurts. Especially when you have to look at it so analytically and critically. It brings up so many feelings of anger.

These women's reactions reveal the emotional difficulties of incorporating oppressed groups' histories and perspectives into the curriculum. Because oppression, slavery, exploitation, and colonization are central to people of color's histories, and because students of color may identify with these groups, reading and discussing these histories can be an emotionally charged experience. While the incorporation of these histories and perspectives are important steps, we should be aware of the work this curriculum demands of particular students. In addition to the work of attending class and completing homework, multicultural curriculum may add an additional layer of work not often recognized or required of schoolwork: emotion work (Hochschild 1983).[3]

Jana, an older, disabled woman of color we interviewed, recalled being one of the few minority female students in a race and gender inclusive class. She felt that the subject matter had more personal relevance for her and required a different level of emotional involvement because her experiences coincided with many of those discussed in readings, films, and lectures. On one occasion, she became extremely distraught when a film on domestic violence among families of color triggered memories of her own experiences as a battered woman. The experience left her feeling immobilized and unable to focus on her other classes that day.

Not only does this curriculum demand different levels of work from different students, it may also make certain students more vulnerable in the classroom. Because the classroom has traditionally been viewed as a site of objective, rational learning, emotional responses are often considered inappropriate (Collins 1990; Ellsworth 1989; Konradi 1993). People of color have historically been stereotyped as overly emotional and unable to control their feelings. As Ellsworth explains, "Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and exotic Others.

In schools, rational deliberation . . . has become a vehicle for regulating conflict and the power to speak" (301). The addition of inclusive curriculum can place students of color in more vulnerable positions by triggering emotional responses which can reinforce white students' stereotypes and threaten the reproduction of racial hierarchies. Furthermore, as Martha explained, having to approach this material in the classroom in only an "analytical and critical" way, without recognizing the emotional aspects or validating the appropriateness of an emotional response, forces students to manage and regulate their responses, and can lead to increased feelings of anger and victimization among students of color. These experiences demonstrate, as Ellsworth points out, that "myths of the ideal rational person . . . have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, [etc.]" (304).

Students also discussed incidences in which their experiences with multicultural curriculum were shaped by the responses of white students in the classroom. Students frequently were subjected to overtly racist behavior. The addition of multicultural material may at times serve as a convenient target for other students' racism. As Maria explained,

> I remember in my introductory history class where we were talking about the distribution of blankets that had smallpox and how this contributed to the downfall of Native Americans. There were three boys behind me who were laughing and one of them said "good." It was almost to the point where he was saying they deserved it. I was mad. I was telling my friend next to me "how could he say that?" And I was ready to turn around and bop him one. When you hear things like that, what are you supposed to do?

Another woman of color recalled that during a race inclusive course, a film was shown depicting the battles of Native Americans to retain their land rights. She found the film moving and painful to watch. In addition to the difficult subject matter, the experience was made even more difficult by other students' responses to the film. She recalled there were several young white males who sat in the back of the classroom and did not pay attention to the film. Instead they constantly laughed, joked, and talked among themselves. She felt offended by their disrespect and by the other students' general lack of concern and compassion. This experience increased her feelings of hopelessness and isolation.

These examples illustrate the importance of understanding the ways in which race inclusive curriculum affects individual students differently. Because multicultural curriculum demands emotion work *in an environment* in which emotions are deemed inappropriate, this can contribute to the disempowerment of students of color, precisely the opposite result of that intended by curriculum integration.

Other students we interviewed, however, revealed that inclusive curriculum can also contribute to more positive relationships among students. Anna, an older woman of color, explained her relationship with younger white students in a class which incorporated multicultural curriculum:

> [I]t gave me a sense of comfort because there's so many other people in the class that could really empathize with my experience. So I felt closer. I felt more a part of the class and not so separate and outside. And then I really got to like the white women in the class. Ordinarily I discovered I had this thing where I don't want white women to tell me, especially some of the young white women, to tell me about oppression. But they explained it so clearly and they have such a view because they're not in it emotionally as much as I am. So I really enjoyed that part. I feel a part of a group in that class. I don't feel separate. That's one time I don't feel separate and apart. One of the hardest things about going to school and being my age is feeling isolated. I really feel lonely.

In this case, because these white students did not feel as emotionally connected to the material and were able to distance themselves from it, they were able to be empathetic and supportive of Anna. Because her experiences were reflected in the course, and because of the support of white students, she felt less isolated.

These examples reveal that there are no guarantees regarding the results of curriculum integration. Students react differently to multicultural curriculum, and these reactions are shaped, at least in part, by students' race. Clearly, curriculum integration is an important step, yet only the first step. We must address other features of the learning environment, including ideologies of rationality and emotion, as well as power dynamics in the classroom, to assure that the addition of race inclusive curriculum will contribute to the empowerment of students of color, rather than ironically reproducing racial hierarchies.

"The Expert Knows"

While students of color have problematized the assumption that knowers should act rationally and objectively, beliefs about who is considered a legitimate source of knowledge also shape the classroom experience. A number of students we interviewed challenged the positioning of teachers as "experts" and sole possessors of knowledge. As one student explained, "We've been taught that the expert knows." Patricia Hill Collins has suggested that according to a Eurocentric, masculinist epistemology, knowledge claims must be created and validated by "experts" or "specialists," as opposed to valuing "concrete experience as a criterion of meaning" (1990, 208). This can lead to numerous problems in race inclusive courses. Because lived experiences are not viewed as appropriate sources of knowledge, students of color who attempt to share their knowledge often find their contribution challenged and, as a result, they are silenced. For example, Anna, a Chicana student, highlighted "the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship" (Ellsworth 1989, 306) when she described her experience in a Spanish class with a teacher who

> would sometimes pronounce things wrong. She made me feel like she thought she knew everything when she didn't. I corrected her a couple times and tried to give her a comment and she was very defensive about it. When I would correct her and tell her it was pronounced this way she would say, "no, it's not" and I said "I know that word and I know you said it wrong" and she said "the book said this and the book said that" and I said "I'm sorry but personally I don't go by the book work. I know how it's supposed to sound and I know how to say it. The way you learn language is by hearing it and speaking it. You don't learn the language out of a book. You just don't." She got very offended and she sort of yelled and had a little temper tantrum and after that I didn't feel like trying very much.

As a result of incidents like this, students often feel that it is not worth speaking up. One student explained,

> "You don't speak up" that's what I hear from Indian people in this community and this school, over and over and over again. When they have spoke up from their perspective, they've been either slapped down, disacknowledged or told that they don't know. The expert knows. They had learned that it [speaking out] would affect their grade, it would affect their getting out of school, and so they've learned to be silent, just like Indians on reservations have learned to be silent.

These examples demonstrate how experiences of students of color may not be recognized as legitimate forms of knowledge and how this can result in their being silenced. Because the university classroom is organized around the positioning of teachers as experts and sole legitimate sources and owners of knowledge, hierarchies are reproduced. The addition of inclusive curriculum alone, without examining the ideologies of knowledge that organize the learning process, can lead to the disempowerment of students of color.

While ideologies defining teachers as legitimate experts shape students' experience in the classroom, we found that whether the teachers were viewed by students as experts or not was shaped by their race. Faculty of color play a critical role in shaping the experiences of students of color. As one student enthusiastically explained,

> [Faculty of color] make all the difference in the world because you identify with this person. They're somebody to look up to because you know this person can make it. I am in deep awe and respect for these people.

Faculty of color often serve as role models for students of color. Some students reported feeling empowered by having someone they perceived as similar to themselves in teaching positions, especially when the individual taught in what the student considered nonhierarchical ways:

> It made me feel like I was coming home. It validated me. Here's another person from my culture who is a professor who didn't have to be an expert, who didn't have to talk the big words.

The alternative perspectives faculty of color may bring to the classroom can enrich the experiences of students of color. One student reported that a professor of color he had was beneficial for both white students and students of color because he was able to provide students with an alternative perspective:

> It's an incredible feeling to have an African American teacher telling the class about things and teaching you things that you don't know about, but that you understand fully because you live in the same spectrum. And having white students' eyes get bigger. Yet some students are really resistant while others really get into it. It's really a lot of fun to know that people are being taught this, and people are accepting it, and they're not feeling threatened by reality.

For students of color, the messenger was often as important as the message. For example, Alicia points out the benefits of taking classes with minority faculty, especially multicultural courses:

> I think we should have more classes for minorities and feel like if there's going to be a Chicano/Latino class taught, it should be taught by a Chicano or else not have that class at all. It would be nice to have someone from your culture teaching a class like

> that. It makes you more interested in it and you can relate to it more. A lot of students get encouraged by it and it makes them do better.

Martin concurred:

> I've had some great experiences with professors of color. I really try to take classes with professors of color because I feel they have a true understanding, both realistically, culturally, and historically, and that they can reach out to the students more.

While many students recognized the possibility that white faculty may be very knowledgeable about multicultural issues, some students questioned the legitimacy of their knowledge claims. Some students assumed faculty of color had more credibility because they were members of a subordinated group, and they questioned the appropriateness of white faculty teaching about nonwhite cultures and language:

> I sometimes feel very discouraged at the classes that are offered. For example, when I took my Spanish class I had a Euro-American teacher. It turns me off. I feel like they shouldn't be teaching this class even if they know the language and the book work and everything. It's very discouraging to me that there's so very, very few faculty of color on this campus and to see someone also trying to teach you your own language when they're not of the same culture. For me it turns me off a lot.

Preference for faculty of color may be due to their ability to develop an environment in which students of color feel more comfortable. Students perceive that the presence of both multicultural curriculum and teachers of color demonstrate the university's commitment to meeting the needs of students of color. This can positively affect the retention rates of students of color. For example, Mike expressed this view when he explained that the presence of minority faculty make

> students feel they can come back to the University. I've heard students say it over and over again, "I'll only come back to this class or to this professor."

However, not all of the students we interviewed agreed; one student felt that students of color should not expect only faculty of color to be responsible for teaching about their racial ethnic groups. She explained,

> I had an ethnic studies teacher and he had to bring in a Native American woman to talk about Native Americans, he had to

> bring in a Chicano to talk about Chicanos, when as a professor, we're paying his salary and he should know that. He should know that information and we should be able to get it from him.

This student questions the use of faculty of color as representatives of their race. While the presence of minority faculty is important, some students perceived relying upon faculty of color as an excuse for other faculty's ignorance of multicultural issues. While students may not all feel the same about who is considered a legitimate teacher of multicultural curriculum, most of the students we talked with did have strong feelings about this issue. Clearly, the race of faculty members shapes students' experiences in the multicultural classroom.

The Tokenization of Students of Color

Just as the number of faculty of color can be an important factor in shaping the experiences of students of color, the number of students of color in the classroom and university are also important. Often, students reported that they were the only, or one of the few, students of color in their classes. Rosabeth Kanter's research on the experiences of token females in male dominated organizations reveals how the limited representation of certain groups can lead to their heightened visibility. Likewise, students of color at this predominantly white university often experience high degrees of visibility. This invariably shapes students' experiences. One student recalled her thoughts upon arriving at the University of Oregon:

> I was surprised that there weren't that many Native American students here, nor many minority students, and that there were hardly any faculty of color here. The low retention rate of students of color also surprised me. I found out that this university is structured in a way that overlooks minority students.

Because of their low numbers, students are first identified by their race. For example, Susan described her feelings about living in this predominantly white state:

> Oregon is not a real hospitable place for blacks to be human. You have to be black. And wherever there are black people, there are more white people, so any black person is like "Well, there's a black person." And you are not Susan, you are "Susan the black person." They say, "We need a black person, call Susan."

This heightened visibility often demands responsibility on the part of students to act as representatives of their racial groups. Students of color are often called upon to present the "minority viewpoint."

This request for representation can take two forms, either request or demand. In the case of representation by request, students report being asked to speak on panels and in classes about their specific racial-ethnic group. One student we interviewed estimated that during her undergraduate career she had responded to invitations to participate in at least fifty panels and classroom lectures concerning her racial-ethnic group. A Native American student recalled similar requests:

> Being a student of color makes me feel like I'm a token here at the university. I often get a call saying "you're a student of color, you're Native American, can you come and answer questions in my class?"

According to Chicana scholar Mary Romero, "Euroamerican academics and administrators are searching for noble savages—once again our 'exotic' difference is to be celebrated. After five hundred years of rape and genocide, if we can still be identified physically as the 'other,' our phenotype is in demand for photo opportunities, posters, panels, guest speakers." (7).

When students are singled out and expected to represent their race, this contributes to the reproduction and consolidation of racial differences in the classroom. When students are asked to represent their racial groups, they have the option of refusing to do so. However, many students discussed the difficulties and dilemmas of making such a choice. For example, Terry reported having ambivalent feelings about such requests:

> I have mixed feelings about it. I feel good that the people want to know, want to listen and want to learn, yet I have another problem with it because it seems that I'm put up on this pedestal to have to open my life to a bunch of strangers.

Requests for representation can also take the form of demand. In these situations, students are called upon in class and their responses (or lack thereof) are attributed to their racial-ethnic group. Often, students are not directly asked, but when issues of race arise, they feel they are the object of other students' stares. One student explained that during an introductory writing class, "We started reading about Malcolm X and everybody turns to me, the only black kid in the class." In these cases, when students are explicitly or implicitly asked to provide their "racial perspective," there is less freedom in choosing to participate. Such requests place students of color "on the spot" and isolate them from other class members. One African American student recalled,

> I really did feel distant from people. There would be something in class pertaining to black people and I'd be the only one who would really feel the intensity. And I knew that the other kids would be looking at me wondering what was happening.

Many students revealed that when the class dealt with racial issues, the classroom's attention turned to the few students of color, as if the curriculum were only relevant to the lives of people of color. These incidents suggest that white students may approach multicultural curriculum in a way that isolates and alienates students of color. All expectations, whether by demand or by request, position students of color as symbols and representatives of their race. This approach to knowledge assumes that "Others" can be "known or ultimately knowable, in the sense of being 'defined, delineated, captured, understood, explained, and diagnosed' at a level of determination never accorded to the 'knower' herself or himself" (Ellsworth 1989, 321).

Students of color resist these assumptions and often view these expectations as a burden. For example, Victor resisted and criticized attempts by students and faculty to position students of color as experts or as representatives of their race:

> What makes anybody think that kid knows anymore than anybody else when our educational system is set up the way it is. It's not fair. And that person would not be responsible for teaching others or be responsible for having to share what his feelings are if he does not feel comfortable with that.

As Victor explains, students of color often grow up in the same culture and educational system as white students and therefore should not be expected to have more knowledge about multicultural issues than other students. This statement questions the reliance upon students of color to teach others about racial issues and suggests that this should not alleviate the responsibility of white students to educate themselves. Furthermore, this student indicates that students of color may be placed in very vulnerable positions when they are expected to reveal their feelings or details about their lives.

Students' resistance to demands that they represent their race may take the form of silence. Students of color may choose not to present controversial opinions to avoid having their views unfairly attributed to their racial group. Jackie, an African American student, explains that

> if you share your own experience of something which is not necessarily true in every case, other students in class take what you say and treat it like gospel and think it must be true for all African Americans.

While self-censorship may be chosen as a form of resistance, many students have discovered that not speaking is a form of speaking in itself. Brenda recalled an incident in the classroom when

> the professor talked about their experience in the Southwest and how the Indians were out there peddling their wares, and when she asked about the origin and the design, they [Native American students in the class] said "Oh we don't know what it is" and so she said "so you see, there are no Indians anymore, not real Indians." And so I spoke up.

Continuing with her story, Brenda explained that while the Native American students in the class pretended not to know the answer to the teacher's question, they did indeed know the answer and deliberately resisted speaking, resisting the professor's attempts to homogenize Native Americans. However, even their silence was taken as a response, allowing the teacher to conclude that there are no "real Indians."

Students felt that speaking and discussing from their own experience was problematic because of the tendency of white students and faculty to treat their individual experiences as representative of the racial group the student belonged to. In addition, students of color are placed in vulnerable positions when asked to discuss personal feelings and experiences. Students of color are often hesitant to contribute to classroom discussions because they are either afraid of being placed in a vulnerable position or do not want to be viewed as representative of their race. The result is that many students of color are silenced. However, the alternative, not to speak, was often seen as equally problematic for a number of reasons: they were frequently the only source of alternative perspectives; there were often no other challenges to racial stereotypes, and they often had strong feelings of responsibility towards family and community.

Many students reported choosing to speak because of feeling responsible for educating others on multicultural issues. For example, Tonya recognized that speaking out was risky because of long-term consequences, but she saw little alternative:

> I am concerned about the use of students being asked to speak about their experiences, because we're very vulnerable. And we can be seen as troublemakers by other universities who are not going to hire us or this medical school isn't going to accept this individual because we're seen as whistle blowers, troublemakers, or whatever. It's risk taking, but I have no choice.

Another student explained that despite the tendency for others to generalize her experience to her racial group, she still agreed to participate in class and to serve on panels:

> I do it for me and I do it for my family and I do it for Native American people here. That's what I have to do because that's what I've been brought up to do, that's part of me.

Joe explained that students of color must often take risks and responsibilities not usually demanded of white students:

> Euroamericans don't have to take the risk. They can step back from it. The difference is I can't, I have no choice . . . If [you're not going to be] assimilated, if you're an Indian, we have no choice. And if you're Black or Chicano, Latino or Hispanic, we have no choice. We can walk away from it, but it makes us ill.

While demands for representation are viewed as problematic, students of color continue to speak out in class and on panels out of a sense of responsibility to educate others. Because students do not see the university as actively committed to increasing diversity and dealing with issues of race and racism, they feel they have little choice but to speak.

Conclusion

A multitude of factors shape and limit the deployment of multicultural curriculum and its reception by students. These factors include the effects of ideologies shaping the learning process; the presence and numbers of faculty and students of color; issues of legitimacy and authority regarding who can and cannot speak about what; and power relations among students and between teachers and students within the classroom.

A truly inclusive, truly transformed educational system is one in which educators become "attentive to the obvious and overt ideological and institutional forces that inform, mediate and constrain their work" (Giroux and Trend 1992, 69). Expanding the curriculum is not enough, and unless we begin seriously engaging other features of the educational system, we will continue to reproduce hierarchical relations in our classrooms. As Ellsworth explains, describing her own teaching experience, "if we were to respond to our context and the social identities of the people in our classroom in ways that did not reproduce the oppressive formations we were trying to work against, we needed classroom practices that confronted the power dynamics inside and outside of our classroom" (315). As educators committed to curriculum integration and the empowerment of students, we must develop new ways of interrogating and challenging these ideologies of education which reproduce hierarchical relations in the classroom. We must also support efforts to recruit and retain faculty and students of color.

Although at times it may seem an ominous challenge, the task of reconstructing higher education has already begun. A growing body of literature takes important steps toward this end. We hope our research contributes to this ongoing challenge by highlighting classroom dynamics which constrain and limit the liberatory possibilities of multicultural curriculum, pointing us in new directions for our research and teaching.[4]

Notes

1. While this paper specifically focuses on race inclusive curriculum and its effects on students of color, our research also addresses the difficulties of gender inclusive curriculum, which we discuss in another paper currently in progress.

2. Julia Lesage's video, *In Plain English* (1991), is based on these interviews. For further information, contact Dr. Lesage at the Department of English, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.

3. While this curriculum may also demand emotion work of white students, our research only focused on students of color. The emotion work required by white students and students of color is likely to be qualitatively different. For example, Bohmer and Briggs found that white students often respond with emotions of guilt and hostility.

4. The order of the authors' names does not reflect the amount of work contributed; this paper is a collaborative effort. We would like to thank Sandra Morgen and Marsha Ritzdorf for their insights on earlier versions of this paper, and the reviewers for their helpful comments.

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4 New Canons, New Problems: The Challenge of Promoting a Sense of Kinship among Students of Diversity

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In his influential 1949 monograph on curriculum development, Ralph Tyler poses four questions that he argues are fundamental to developing curriculum and instruction (1):

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Essentially, he suggests that a school needs to articulate an overall philosophy about the purpose of education, which in turn will help identify a set of goals or objectives for students to achieve. These broader issues suggest appropriate materials and learning activities for students to experience, and also the organizing principles behind their sorting and sequencing over the course of schooling. The assessment of student achievement should be in line with the philosophy that has generated the curriculum. All of this sounds very simple and sensible. Yet implementing it has proven to be difficult for schools from kindergarten to college.

One reason that Tyler's elegant model has been difficult to achieve is that people have a hard time agreeing on the purpose of schooling. And as our nation's campuses become increasingly diverse through open admissions policies, minority incentive programs, the influx of foreign students, and other means, it becomes more difficult to agree upon the goals of schooling. "Celebrating diversity" has become a slogan on many campuses, at least among students of diversity and many of the professoriate; yet the celebration of diversity often results in a Balkanization of interests, a loss of a sense of identity with good old State U., and a focus instead on the interests of different campus subgroups. Such developments are distressing for members of the campus community who, with the best of intentions, want to promote harmony and common understanding throughout the university, yet often see their efforts to enlighten students about one another's cultures and needs result in aggravated tensions between gays and straights, men and women, blacks and whites, natives and foreigners, and other groups.

Universities are left with a paradox. On the one hand we are in an era of increasing pluralism with its potential both for enriching campus life with multiple perspectives and for fragmenting students and faculty into competing subgroups. At the same time, universities have a heritage of promoting a sense of citizenship among their students. Kathryn Wentzel has found that "the development of social responsibility in the form of citizenship skills and moral character is often considered to be a primary function of schooling" with "the instructional process directly [promoting] the development of social responsibility" (1). Even in the campus protests of the 1960s and 1970s, students believed they were acting out of a sense of citizenship; the movements for civil rights, women's rights, ending the Vietnam war, and other rights issues were led by groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society, a name that suggests reform rather than overthrow of the existing system.

If a philosophical tenet is to provide coherent direction to an educational program, it requires articulation. Clarifying the meaning of terms such as *citizenship* and *social responsibility* becomes critical when these have been claimed as a basis for action by such diverse Americans as Oliver North and 2 Live Crew. Sandra Stotsky (1989), rooted in the New England ideal of an active citizenry in pursuit of a national purpose, has sought to develop a working definition of what she calls a *civic identity* in order to address the dilemma we face as a democracy composed of countless subgroups, each competing for political power. A civic identity, she says, is

> the psychological foundation for participation in public life as a "citizen," as someone with a sense of the common good as well as a sense of one's own interests or a particular group's interests. Civic identity includes more than a sense of belonging to a particular political entity that can be defined by specific political principles and processes. It is also a sense of kinship with all those who live within the boundaries of that political entity, regardless of economic, intellectual, ethnic, or religious differences. Civic identity transcends individual or group differences,

> permitting individuals or groups of individuals to consider the well-being of the whole political community.

She stresses that a civic identity involves "a feeling of kinship [which] undergirds a sense of responsibility for all those who share one's civic communities," so that "The common good can emerge only when all participants in a political conflict believe that they share some essential values despite individual or group interests" (1991, 24).

With Stotsky's definition in mind, let us assume that promoting a civic identity among students is an important objective of schooling. Any one who has followed the news knows that very few campuses across the country have been successful in establishing a civic identity within a pluralistic student body. Among the most notorious cases of student conflict—primarily in the form of race-related hostilities—have been incidents at some of the nation's most elite universities. The solutions—such as requiring students to take courses in multicultural education, imposing severe penalties against hate speech, and requiring students to read texts by women and minority writers—have often created as many problems as they have solved. Educators are then left with a perplexing question: If we are to celebrate cultural and ethnic diversity, can we simultaneously promote a civic identity? We tend to believe that we can, but doing so is highly problematic and must grow from *principled decisions* based on carefully considered criteria. English departments have often been at the center of controversies as they have attempted to enlighten students regarding issues of diversity, through curriculum change and required readings. Such efforts have sometimes been perceived as efforts at political indoctrination rather than as provision of a liberal arts education. In order to avoid dichotomous perceptions such as these and to make principled decisions, English departments might consider a set of questions that would help justify curricular decisions. Such questions might include the following:

1. In a society composed of countless subgroups with distinct histories and identities, how can we include the voices and experiences of all or most of our various subcultures? If we strive for multicultural inclusion, which of the myriad groups should we single out for our students to be exposed to? Should our selection criteria be driven by race, religion, ethnicity, continent of origin, region within the United States, political values, or some other source of determination? If we choose according to one of these criteria, on what basis do we then choose the voices from within each subgroup?

2. Should the potential offensiveness of a work be a consideration in our selection process? Is the profane and racially inflammatory language of James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* a sufficient reason not to use it in the classroom? Is the persistent use of the word *nigger* and the overwhelmingly bigoted views of the characters in *Huckleberry Finn* good reason for our students not to read it?

3. Should the particular moral, social, or political values imparted through a text be a consideration in our selection process? For example, should the anti-business values of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* or Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* work against their selection? Should we—can we—seek to teach texts in a values-neutral way in the classroom and thus avoid the issue? Should the question of values be of greater or lesser importance than the literary merit of the works?

4. Should we seek to achieve a balance of positive and negative images in the depiction of various subgroups and genders? If we have our students read Richard Wright's *Native Son*, for instance, which depicts the discrimination against urban blacks in the 1930s, should we attempt to balance this grim portrayal with an uplifting story of black accomplishment such as Pauli Murray's family history, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family*?

5. Should we choose texts that are often misunderstood due to the author's use of sophisticated literary techniques, such as ironic distance between the author's views and those of the speaker as in Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?

6. Can we solve any and all of these problems by providing an appropriate instructional context for the literature we use in our classrooms? In other words, can we teach any problematic text in such a way that it can be a potentially valuable experience for any student? Or are some texts prohibitively problematic, particularly in certain communities? We might assume that John Updike's *Rabbit Redux*, with its profanity, sex, drugs, and violence would create a stir in many conservative Christian universities. But might books such as *Little Women* also cause a commotion on campuses with a great sensitivity to women's issues?

The six sets of questions raised here are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to introduce ethical problems that face teachers in the selection of literature and the design of experiences students will have with it. The questions point to both the content and process of instruction: Which texts should we assign students to read? Does the manner in which we teach them affect their impact on students?

At this point I would like to take several texts frequently found in curricula and discuss problems they present in light of the goal of a civic education. The discussion will center on three types of texts that raise troublesome issues for teachers: ironic texts about social issues, "representative" texts that are intended to depict the experiences of a particular group of people, and didactic texts taught to challenge beliefs.

Ironic Texts about Social Issues

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is one of the most celebrated, widely read, and frequently protested books in the history of American letters. It has also been among the most frequently read books in American universities. Those who believe that *Huck Finn* is a work of great literary merit have interpreted the text through a recognition of Twain's use of dramatic irony; that is, the distinction he has created between his own views and those of the speaker, Huck. Let us look at Huck's narration in a passage from Chapter 31, "You Can't Pray A Lie":

> Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was as long as he'd *got* to be a slave, and so I'd better write a letter to Tom Sawyer and tell him to tell Miss Watson where he was. But I soon give up that notion for two things: she'd be mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her, and so she'd sell him straight down the river again; and if she didn't everybody naturally despises an ungrateful nigger, and they'd make Jim feel it all the time, and so he'd feel ornery and disgraced. And then think of *me*! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't a-going to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared. Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for

> myself by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame, but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday school, you could 'a' gone to it; and if you'd 'a' done it they'd 'a' learnt you there that people that acts as I'd been acting about the nigger goes to everlasting fire."

As a high school English teacher, I assigned *Huck Finn* to my American literature students for many years. Yet the responses of my black students, who composed about 30 percent of my classes, made me increasingly uneasy about the role of the book in the civic education of my students. In the paragraph just cited the word *nigger* appears four times, and it recurs routinely throughout the book. The white characters repeatedly assert and assume that Negroes are *property* for them to use as they please, and that God supports their subjugation. A detached reader can make the intellectual argument that Twain is demonstrating that these beliefs are wrong; that the white characters who have bone-deep beliefs about the subhumanity of blacks have themselves been drawn by Twain to exhibit hypocrisy, avarice, and other negative traits, while Jim in contrast is noble, honest, and deeply sympathetic.

The question I would pose regarding the use of this text, and others like it, is: To what extent does a work of literature—regardless of its apparent literary merit—contribute to a sense of civic identity when the speaker condones the degradation of characters based on race or ethnicity? In works that appear to employ irony in such a way that the interactions of characters work against the construction of a sense of kinship among readers, how do we help students make an intellectual judgment apart from their emotional response to the story? We see an interesting modern reversal of this problem in the film *Do the Right Thing*, written, produced, and directed by Spike Lee, and also starring Lee in the role of a black employee who starts a riot against his generally sympathetic white employer. Does Spike Lee, in occupying all of the central roles in the creation and production of the film and then himself playing the role of lead rioter, advocate the behavior of his character? Is he endorsing this as the "right thing" to do?

Intellectually, we might argue that Lee is being ironic and cautioning *against* the actions of his protagonist. Similarly, we can argue that Mark Twain is setting up his characters to reveal the folly of a racist society. Teachers using these texts with students who cannot create intellectual distance from stories are faced with difficult questions. In that we must accept the works as ironic in order to interpret them as socially constructive, on what grounds do we select them for students to read? Research by Michael Smith has suggested that novice readers take a "submissive" stance in response to a text; that is, they accept the authority of the narrator without question. Students he studied "did not make inferences and . . . focused only on literal interpretation. They never questioned the source from which they received the information in a story, and they could not control the associations engendered by texts" (7). Many readers—both young students and adults—do not respond to *Huckleberry Finn* and *Do the Right Thing* as ironic, but accept the surface meaning instead and respond emotionally rather than intellectually. Given this generally "submissive" approach to texts—one that Smith argues requires extensive instruction in interpretive strategies to overcome—and given the strong emotional response many readers have to the language of certain texts, on what grounds do we justify teaching ironic literature in which the narrator condones socially destructive behavior?

If one can justify the selection of such texts, how then do we use them in the classroom, particularly with students who feel personally degraded or threatened by them? Is an intellectual interpretation sufficient? Ironic literature is consistently difficult for readers to interpret, particularly when the irony requires high levels of inference. What challenges do these texts present in the classroom if our goal is to promote social cohesion and mutual understanding in a pluralistic, democratic society?

Texts Selected to "Represent" a Particular Group of People

A second type of text that presents problems for teachers concerned with a civic education is one that is chosen to "represent" a particular group of people. Many curricula are now being rewritten to reflect concerns for global consciousness, racial and ethnic diversity, and gender issues, and are attempting to depart from reading lists heretofore restricted to works written by dead white American and British males. One problem with diversifying reading lists is that the world is indeed a diverse place. While we have relatively few genders to complicate the selection of materials, we have many, many countries, most of which are composed of members of widely varying cultures, religions, ethnicities, and so on, all of which may have had different characteristics at different points in history. Changing curricula to reflect global consciousness then becomes a prohibitively diffuse task, forcing us to select those works that will constitute our new culturally diverse curriculum. And, as James Moffett has pointed out, when we make these selections we do so with a bias that undoubtedly affects our students. Which countries should our anthologies represent? When we choose writers to represent Africa, should they be from Madagascar, Ivory Coast, Egypt, South Africa, or someplace else? And after we have made these decisions, we are faced with the problem of diversity within nations. Writers are often identified as representing one country or another, even such extraordinarily diverse nations as India, China, Brazil, and others. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union illustrates the problems we create when we attempt to represent authors by nationality, which in many parts of the world is an ephemeral means of identification.

On a more local level, we have an attempt to represent the various peoples of the United States through the inclusion of multicultural voices in our new curricula. Once again we have the problem of selection: Which writers represent which groups of people? Should we attempt to represent all racial and ethnic groups who occupy our nation? Which voices represent Latinos who originate from such distinct nations as Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Panama, Venezuela, and many others? The group we call Native American is considerably more diverse, with the state of Oklahoma alone including close to seventy different tribes, many of which originate from different parts of the continent, speak different languages, have developed different cultures, and were continually at war with one another for centuries. Which tribes should speak for such a diverse race of people?

More relevant to the issue of a civic education is the problem of selecting works that negatively depict the lives of a racial or ethnic group. We can see this problem through the example of Richard Wright's frequently taught autobiography *Black Boy*. Without question, this book has great historical and literary significance and should be read by all Americans who seek an understanding of American society. Wright is one of the century's most important writers, and his story teaches us much about the oppressive racism in Mississippi in the early part of the century, as in the following passage:

> One afternoon I was wheeling my barrow toward the pond when something sharp sank into my thigh. I whirled; the dog crouched a few feet away, snarling. I had been bitten. I drove the dog away and opened my trousers; teeth marks showed deep and red.

> I did not mind the stinging hurt, but I was afraid of an infection. When I went to the office to report that the boss's dog had bitten me, I was met by a tall blonde white girl.
>
> "What do you want?" she asked.
>
> "I want to see the boss, ma'am."
>
> "For what?"
>
> "His dog bit me, ma'am, and I'm afraid I might get an infection."
>
> "Where did he bite you?"
>
> "On my leg," I lied, shying from telling her where the bite was.
>
> "Let's see," she said.
>
> "No ma'am. Can't I see the boss?"
>
> "He isn't here now," she said, and went back to her typing.
>
> I returned to work, stopping occasionally to examine the teeth marks; they were swelling. Later in the afternoon a tall white man wearing a cool white suit, a Panama hat, and white shoes came toward me.
>
> "Is this the nigger?" he asked a black boy as he pointed at me.
>
> "Yes, sir," the black boy answered.
>
> "Come here, nigger," he called me.
>
> I went to him.
>
> "They tell me my dog bit you," he said.
>
> "Yes, sir."
>
> I pulled down my trousers and he looked.
>
> "Humnnn," he grunted, then laughed. "A dog bite can't hurt a nigger."
>
> "It's swelling and it hurts," I said.
>
> "If it bothers you, let me know," he said. "But I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger."
>
> He turned and walked away and the black boys gathered to watch his tall form disappear down the aisles of wet bricks.

Wright experienced this humiliation in 1924, and without question young black boys and girls are going through similar degradations in various parts of the United States in the 1990s. The inclusion of *Black Boy* in a curriculum becomes problematic through the context in which it is typically taught. In a survey of secondary school teachers (Stotsky and Anderson 1990), *Black Boy* was one of the forty-five most frequently recommended books. Only three other authors identified in the survey were black, the others being Maya Angelou, Lorraine Hansberry, and Zora Neale Hurston, all of whose books concern pre-Civil Rights Movement experiences. We might conclude, therefore, that "the black experience" in the United States is often represented in secondary school curricula by books that focus on events taking place prior to 1955, and often long before then, in settings notorious for their oppressive treatment towards blacks.

I know of no similar studies conducted at the college level. If one example may serve, however, the general education literature reading list at the University of Iowa includes Wright, Angelou, Hurston, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, as well as works by Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall. The perspective as a whole is weighted toward the pre-Civil Rights conditions of black America, making students' literary exposure to "the black experience" one in which both the legal system and the attitudes of whites combine to provide a life of unrelenting harshness. The canon of African American literature offered to students would appear, therefore, to work against the construction of productive relationships between races and the generation of solutions to *modern* race problems, which I think are quite different from those of the early part of the century given the massive changes in the legal system since the 1950s.

I wish to emphasize again that the texts by Wright, Angelou, and others are exceptional works of literature and are essential reading for concerned citizens. But when they are among the few texts selected to depict the lives of African American citizens, they offer a very narrow, negative, and potentially destructive view of the experiences of black Americans. In the 1990s we unquestionably have far too many black citizens whose lives are adversely affected by discrimination. But we also have a strong, growing black middle class and prominent, successful black leaders such as Colin Powell and Carol Mosely Braun. Should American students be exposed to a view of black Americans that focuses on vitriolic, dead-end encounters with whites? Are black and white people encouraged to develop a sense of kinship with one another through exclusive exposure to such texts?

A related problem in these texts is the lumping together of "white people" as a monolithic, generally evil group. In *Black Boy*, Wright repeatedly makes statements such as "White people looked upon Negroes as a variety of children." Perhaps to Wright, the white people of his community were quite homogeneous and could be regarded as a single culture. But many white people have very little in common with one another other than the fact that their skins come in various shades of a generally light hue. An Israeli American Hasidic Jewish delivery truck driver from New York City, an Italian American Catholic ACLU lawyer from Tampa, an Orthodox Greek American hairstylist from Chicago, a Norwegian American chimney sweep from rural Minnesota, a Lithuanian American Buddhist racehorse trainer from Louisville, and a mixed-nationality atheist real estate developer from the suburbs of Sacramento are all white people, but do they represent white America any more than young Richard Wright represents black America? Should we also begin singling out white subgroups for representation in curricula? And if so, how are we to define these subgroups? By nationality? Religion? Region? Political affiliation? How does such an approach to selection contribute to a sense of social cohesion among students? By selecting according to subgroup characteristics, are we also helping to foster a subgroup orientation? What happens to a sense of personal uniqueness when works are selected because they represent the experiences of particular groups? Teachers need to consider these problems when selecting materials, and consider how the experiences of literary characters contribute to a sense of civic identity among students.

Didactic Texts That Challenge Beliefs

One of the reasons I have always valued education is that it has brought me in contact with ideas that I never would have otherwise considered. Through my education I have read *The Communist Manifesto, The Analects of Confucius, The Koran,* and countless other texts that have challenged the ways in which I had grown up to think about the world. Like many who take up education as a profession, I have often assumed that we all not only benefit from exposure to a variety of ideas, but *want* to see the world from as many perspectives as possible in order to get the clearest sense of our own personal beliefs.

It takes little more than a week's reading of the campus paper's editorial page, however, to learn that not everyone seeks a broader view of the world. Yet faculty often feel that we have a duty to provide enlightenment for our students whether they want it or not. We feel that this need is especially strong when we see hatred and discrimination played out on our campuses. A racial slur scrawled on the lavatory wall, gay bashing at a campus tavern, cases of rape and sexual harassment—these and other incidents are frighteningly common across American campuses, and as part of the university community we feel the need *to do something* to change students' attitudes. Because books have always been our medium of passing along great ideas, we often attempt to address issues of bigotry and discrimination through changes in curriculum.

In doing so we have found out a few things. One is that not everyone wants to be exposed to new ideas; many people are quite content with the ones they have. Indeed, people are often fiercely loyal to the ideas they have grown up with and would feel that they are betraying their homes and communities if they were to change. As a result they often adamantly resist what they feel are attempts to indoctrinate them into new ways of thinking, and they become more entrenched in their beliefs than ever.

This resistance has led to a second realization, that books don't have the same transforming effect on many people that they do on people who end up being college professors. Most current research in reading stresses the constructive nature of the reading process, with the text providing a set of signs—a blueprint of sorts—from which readers construct meaning based on their personal histories, their cultural backgrounds, and the orientations they've learned toward reading. Messages are not transmitted intact from authors to texts to readers, but are reconstructed by individual readers according to the knowledge and attitudes they bring to the transaction. Student readers, then, do not all approach reading in the open-minded way that most professors do. As a result, our efforts to address what we perceive as attitude problems through curricular change often backfire when students resist the ideas altogether, reconstruct them to justify their preconceived beliefs, or reject them through their preexisting frameworks.

We can find many examples of the ways in which this process works. Perhaps the most infamous took place at the University of Texas at Austin in the early 1990s, where many people in the English department were disturbed by the increasing outbreaks of hostility over civil rights issues in the Austin community. The coordinators of the freshman composition program decided that one way to get students to be more sensitive to one another was to involve them in the analysis of Supreme Court cases that concerned civil rights issues.

The course covered the same type of writing instruction that students would ordinarily get in a freshman composition course, with a special emphasis on learning how to construct and critique legal arguments. The course also gave great attention to the process of writing arguments, with students producing several drafts of each assignment, working together in writing groups, doing collaborative research in the library, participating in peer critiques, and otherwise sharing their developing essays with other students and the teacher. Judged on the basis of its method of teaching writing, few would doubt that the course was exemplary in its potential for teaching students to critique and write arguments with expertise.

The idea of using court cases as the basis of study was also inspired. Almost everyone loves a good court case. The courtroom drama is a staple of television and film and has served as the basis of classroom simulation games (Smagorinsky 1994). The trouble with the course came through its selection of court cases to study. The cases all concerned civil rights issues of some sort, including racial prejudice, gay rights, and women's issues. Some members of the UT faculty opposed the content of the course and took their case to the local papers, who were very willing to report to the public the "political correctness" of the radical UT English department. The uproar got national press attention and was the subject of a panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in which disputatious members of the UT English department aired their differences in public. The issue was equally inflammatory among students who defended both sides of the case with passion yet little persuasion. In the end a number of prominent faculty left the university, and the curriculum was modified to mollify those who remained.

The University of Texas case is but one of many I could have cited. Many campuses have attempted a similar sort of enlightenment using literature or courses in multiculturalism to help change attitudes, only to run into resistance. As a profession we are stuck in the middle of a problem that seems to have no clear solution. We are too idealistic to sit back and allow bigotry to go unchecked, yet when we attempt to address it through academic measures, we sometimes exacerbate the problem. Perhaps we are too impatient; perhaps the initial hostility is something we must go through in order to achieve long-term change. Yet that is what we thought in the sixties, and many of the same problems that plagued us then are still with us today. And perhaps we are wrong in thinking that it is our duty to change people's deeply ingrained beliefs about society, in spite of how destructive we find them. After all, from their perspective, *we* are the ones who are being destructive.

I hope that I am wrong about this last possibility, for I cannot imagine myself being any the better for never having changed. As educators, though, we need to search for a better process than simply to assume that assigning the right books will address the attitudinal problems we perceive among our students. The UT program, I think, was admirable in the way in which it attempted to *involve* students in the process of discussing real and compelling court cases, examining the arguments made by both sides, and coming to conclusions about which arguments had the most merit; yet it met with tremendous resistance, inflamed greatly by members of the press who in most cases had never read the syllabus or talked with any of the professors who had developed it.

Perhaps the problem in Texas had a particular regional flavor; many students come from conservative Christian communities and are resistant to attacks on their values. In such communities the pejorative label of *political correctness* gets applied to almost any action that challenges the status quo; here in Oklahoma, Native Americans who protest sports team mascots such as *Savages* and *Chiefs* have been labeled *politically correct* by the local press. I'm not quite sure how we could ever go about changing such attitudes in the society at large, or whether it's even worth the bother. Yet on campuses we expect more. Most of our efforts to change attitudes through assigned readings have had, at best, mixed success. As a profession we need to give a great deal of thought to why this is so, and continue to work at developing possible ways to help our students think of themselves as diverse members of a larger, mutually enriching community.

Discussion

The issues I have discussed all help to pose the question: On what basis do teachers make decisions about the experiences they encourage students to have with literature? Through much of this essay I have tried to outline difficulties in teaching texts frequently read by college students. At this point I'd like to discuss some possible solutions to the issues I've raised.

For me, the most troublesome problem of those I've examined is whether or not to teach novels such as *Huckleberry Finn*. Many teachers have an immense loyalty to this book and regard it as essential reading; only an unsophisticated reader, they say, could fail to see the ironic distance between Twain's own views on bigotry and those expressed by the speaker, Huck. My own experiences in teaching *Huck Finn* to multiracial classes, however, have suggested to me that understanding the novel on an intellectual level is only one of many responses people may have to it. Many black students I have taught have acknowledged the differences in belief between author and speaker and have recognized the novel's literary merit, yet still have been deeply hurt by the attitudes expressed by Huck and have requested that we please not read any more stories that used the word *nigger*. I have heard this sort of student response patronizingly referred to as the "hurt feelings" of a small group of readers, a consideration that should not impair our vision of what benefits most students in the long run. I would argue that these students have experienced a much deeper pain, one that we (I suppose that by *we* I mean white, middle-class English teachers) need to try to understand and help to heal.

So am I suggesting that we stop teaching *Huckleberry Finn*? Not really, although I became increasingly troubled by the novel each year I taught it. I would suggest a greater sensitivity in our teaching that reflects our recognition that the experiences of some of our students may not enable a dispassionate reading. In this light we would need to be very open-minded in listening to student responses and try to work constructively with them. If *Huck Finn* is truly a great book, then students should have great experiences with it. I don't think this is possible unless we treat the book emotionally as well as intellectually.

I find the problems addressed in the section on "representative" texts to be troubling in that the manner in which these stories are taught seems to reinforce many of the attitudes teachers purport to be combatting. I believe as earnestly as anyone that we need to share and empathasize with the experiences of our various minority groups. I think, however, that the goal of hearing multicultural voices in a truly representative way is impossible, and that we are then left with the problem of making decisions about which *black* books to read, which *Latino* books, and so on. We need, however, to represent people as complex and balanced so that when students read *Black Boy* or *Native Son* their exposure to African American experiences also includes family dramas such as the film *To Sleep with Anger.*

If I had a solution to the problem of changing attitudes through didactic texts, then I would likely be President of the United Nations rather than an assistant professor of education. My review of the problems in Texas should not be taken as a criticism of their approach but as an account of what can happen with even the most nobly intended, well designed program. I see the challenge of ending discrimination on campus as one of our most important goals, and I am not prepared to abandon the quest. If changes in curriculum are to be part of the solution, however, we need to monitor student response to the programs to see just what their effects are. We cannot simply assume that reading the "right" books will result in attitudinal change. Most of the attention in efforts to reform the canon has fallen on *which texts to read.* I, too, have given substantial attention to problems involved in selecting the materials that make up a curriculum. Yet selecting books is only one part of the problem; focusing solely on the content of the curriculum ignores much about the educational process. We cannot separate the content of the curriculum from the ways in which teachers use the texts in their classes. The question of *whether* to teach *Huck Finn*, for instance, is tied to the question of *how* to teach *Huck Finn*. Making a decision to teach the text involves a responsibility to address both the emotional effect of the work upon students and the strategic problem of how to identify and interpret irony. Even if the strategic problem of interpretation is successfully managed, many students still are unable to overcome their emotional resistance to the text. In discussing a *new canon*, therefore, we must broaden our vision beyond the idea that the books themselves constitute some sort of prescription for new values and look more carefully at the constructive nature of the reading process and the ways in which classroom processes and the instructional context influence readers' construction of texts.

Slogans such as *celebrate diversity* are appealing and have become ubiquitous on conference programs and in campus headlines. Uttering the phrase, however, is much easier than agreeing on what it means. Attempts to celebrate diversity on campus should surely be a part of a greater effort to establish a sense of kinship among members of the college community. That sense of kinship needn't be, and most likely won't be, idyllic. Diverse people often disagree about what is best for the group as a whole. What is important is that the interests of subgroups not take precedence over the good of the community. The curriculum—including both the content and process of educational experiences—is often thought to be a central means of providing a core of ideas through which students discuss their purpose as an educational community. Faculty need to consider many issues other than the value of particular texts in deciding which selections students should read and which pedagogical strategies are appropriate for particular teaching situations. The texts themselves, as most modern critics acknowledge, do not have a message that they transmit directly to students, but rather are reconstructed differently by readers with different experiences and orientations. If books are to be an important part of our students' development, then the manner in which we teach them contributes greatly to the ways in which our students grow.

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II Place, Position, and Power

5 A Journey Defined by Place: Anti-Racism in the College Classroom

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I should admit from the start that I came to the teaching of English with a decidedly political agenda. By this I mean that I wanted my students to be empowered, to find in literature ways of making sense of the world and of the variety of lives and meanings that make it up. Of course, I also wanted my students to master some writing and reading skills, but I felt those tasks were inextricable from a critical response to what we now easily refer to as the "social construction" of knowledge and identity.[1]

As a young feminist, issues of gender were significant to me. But for a variety of reasons, issues of race were also among my central concerns, and this became increasingly true as I followed the geographic odyssey that has described my career path and brought me to Mississippi, where I now teach. This odyssey and the diverse classroom settings it has entailed have convinced me of the often unacknowledged importance of place in any discussion of the teaching of multicultural literature.

Though I didn't realize it fully at the time, this sense of place first struck me when I moved from Seattle, Washington, a large cosmopolitan city with a range of ethnicities, to Iowa City, Iowa, where I began my graduate work and teaching career. The move proved a shock to me in ways I could only hint at. I knew I missed the diversity and action of a larger city, but there was something else.

My students were startlingly nordic looking, and as I came to know them, I discovered the thread of similarity in life experience and culture which their coloring suggested. Raised for the most part in rural communities in Iowa, they were predominantly Northern European in heritage and Protestant in faith. They were democratic in spirit, but conservative and often reactionary in values. Born in the late sixties and seventies, they had no memory of the historical events that had overwhelmingly shaped my notions of community:

the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the resignation of President Nixon, and the collapse of his administration.

Though they were mostly white like me, we often struggled to span the differences in perspectives which our experiences had generated. Often we came to a stalemate: I wanted to change the world, and literature was part of that; they wanted to find good-paying jobs and live as their parents did. Reading literature was generally believed to be a credentialing step in that direction—perhaps even a pleasurable one—but nonetheless a step, not a practice or a way of seeing, not central to living. Unlike me, they weren't interested in looking for battles that might upset the balance of things, though they were outspoken in their defense of what they believed to be traditional American values. Vaguely defined, these might be described as justice for all and the chance to work hard and pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

There were exceptions among the students to this rule, but that's exactly what they were, exceptions: an Asian American or an African American student here or there, usually from Chicago, Des Moines, or Sioux City, hours from the small-town culture of Iowa City.

Initially I was delighted to have these "representatives" of cultural and racial difference in my classroom. I write this knowing that at the time, though I often felt uncomfortable with the position of that lone student in my class and worried about how to make him or her feel "safe," I didn't really understand what I was doing by investing them with the charge of representing "difference" for the rest of us. All of which is to say, though I knew that I was white (that is, raced) and that there were distinct cultural differences between me and my white midwestern students, when I taught an all-white class I assumed a lack of difference, a sameness that was broken only by differences of sex, age, and experience. The ethnicity of white students that I describe above struck me as remarkable only in its seeming uniformity. To put this more simply, I realized the uniformity among the ethnic heritages of my white students only *because* racial difference seemed "lacking."

At the time, I had begun to read and was increasingly drawn to postmodern theory as a way of explaining the relationships between reader, writer, text, and world that defined my inquiries as teacher and critic. But what happened to shift my consciousness, significantly, occurred outside the academy. Invited by the director of the local Women's Center to join an interracial committee of community women concerned with combatting racism, I agreed. The committee—made up of women who were straight and lesbian; working-, middle- and upper-class; white and of color; from both the United

States and Central and South America; Jewish, Christian, agnostic, and atheist—met once a week. What I discovered among these women and what kept me going to those committee meetings for the next six years was a shared commitment, not to directing other people's battles with racism but, rather, to working out our own.[2] We read and talked weekly and engaged an occasional facilitator to help us work through the issues that arose. Slowly, we developed ways of thinking about and working with racial and other forms of difference that felt right and, more significantly, that transformed my practice as a teacher.

None of what we came to articulate as our "fundamental principles" originated with us.[3] Yet, as I began to respond to others in accord with these ideas, in particular to the students in my classrooms, I realized how transforming they could be. In basic form they go like this:

- Racism is not innate or "natural"; it is learned behavior; therefore, it can be unlearned.
- It is not our differences that separate us. Rather, it is our refusal to recognize, accept, and celebrate our differences.
- Racism hurts everybody, not just people of color. We all can be, and have been, both victims and oppressors.
- Racism = prejudice + power.

These notions helped me to facilitate discussions about race and racism in my classes in a number of ways.[4] Perhaps most of all, they helped me see past oppressive positions my students might take to the ways in which these positions forced them into uncomfortable and often painful relations with others. Attending to the pain, fear, and frustration implicit in their claims, I was often better able to help them imagine ways of relating to others that didn't leave them feeling so powerless. In a Foucauldian sense, I was able to see the ways in which their views had been produced by a cultural "regime of truth" in which racial difference was inherently a stumbling block to human interaction and connection.[5] Consequently, I was able to understand the pain and rage with which their views were often expressed as forms of resistance to racism.[6]

Further, I became increasingly facile at recognizing and demonstrating to them the nature of our multiple identities—defined by age, race, class, and sexual orientation, for instance—and the ways in which this weave must complicate our notions of power. I learned to distinguish between guilt—for racist acts personally committed—and responsibility—for acting in the world in such a way that makes racism less likely, if not impossible. Working from this perspective, I was less likely, as well, to feel shamed by the racism of my white students or fearful of the rage or passivity of my students of color. I no longer feared what my students might say or feel. Hence, I became, though with a more tenuous sense of how such practices can work in a classroom, a much more effective facilitator of my students' attempts to make sense of themselves, and the variety of voices they read.

I write this last because institutional and discursive pressures incline us toward generalizations about our pedagogies that elide the differences in place that shape our responses to the world around us. If we attend to the process of teaching closely enough, we will continually consider the nature of the places from which we and our students speak. But sustaining that kind of critical consciousness is damn hard work.

The following narratives of classroom experience suggest how I was forced to discover this fact. There is a double gesture at work here: a celebrative description of a certain approach to issues of race in the classroom and also a refusal of universal prescriptions. Place, that conjunction of histories and identities that ultimately describes us all, constantly shifts the ground upon which we stand, forcing us, as I have discovered, to alter the meanings we attach to it.

I

In my last year in Iowa I was invited to teach a course on literature by women of color in the Women's Studies department of a small liberal arts college not far from Iowa City. Thrilled with the extra money and the chance to teach texts which had helped to forge my own notions of what a multicultural literature course could be, I enthusiastically agreed.

Planning the course, I knew that issues of identity and oppression needed to be central. Considering the texts and the pace of the course, I worried about the ghettoizing effects of a course in which women of color could be marginalized, and about the trivialization of a "today is Monday so it's Native Americans" manner of proceeding. Consequently, I structured the syllabus in two ways. First, I wanted the question of *how* we read, the issue of *what* literature is and does and *who* decides, to come first. More precisely, I wanted the question of the category of literature to collide with the categories of race—that is, the shared dynamic of oppression that the course title assumed. I did this by opening the course with Virginia

Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* followed by bell hooks's *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center.* Second, I paired texts conventionally considered *literary* with biographies. We read Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* with Mary Crow Dog's *Lakota Woman*, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* with Audre Lorde's *Zami*, Maxine Hong-Kingston's *Woman-Warrior* with Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places.*

But just as creating a syllabus is only the first step in any real teaching experience, so it is that devising this strategy and negotiating it as a teacher were two different things. But I was confident. Armed with the principles cited above, I believed that I could model ways of thinking about difference, and more specifically race, that would help my students, both white and of color, learn more about the construction and meanings of race. Armed with such tools, they might, I hoped, better understand the beauty of literature shaped by the experience of women of color.

The make-up of the class was typical of what one expects at most predominantly white colleges: out of thirteen students I had nine white women, one white man, two black women (one from Chicago by way of the American South and one a first generation West-Indian American), and one second generation Japanese American.

We agreed from the start that it was crucial that all have the opportunity to speak, and that we would work hard to create the kind of atmosphere in which everyone would feel safe to speak. The students agreed to the format but with little sense, it seemed to me then, of what kinds of struggles real safety might demand.

At our first meeting, the most outspoken of the students, both white and of color, expressed a kind of relief. Finally! they said, to be in a class where women's issues would be taken seriously. The assumption of unity based upon our feminism appeared comforting—but not for long. Reading Woolf against hooks, we began to articulate the terms of our differences and the ways in which differences, of race and class particularly, were both social constructions and yet defining aspects of our own personal identities, the place from which our readings and interpretations of literature began.

An example of this difference was presented within our first discussion. My Japanese American student, I'll call her Nellie, began class one day by demanding to know why we were reading a white woman (Woolf) in a class, indeed the *only* class in the college catalogue, she declared, which took seriously the experiences and work of women of color?

The challenge was presented to me, but it sent a volt through the white students in the class. Though some sympathized with her concerns in a "Oh, yeah, why is that?" kind of way, there was a nervousness about her anger. They clearly identified at some level with the Anglo-European-classicist traditions Woolf represented. More significantly perhaps, their nervousness suggested knowledge of the safety that my authority guaranteed them—a safety suddenly at risk. They watched me very carefully as I answered Nellie by saying that I chose Woolf because I wanted us to be clear that women of color were not writing in a vacuum but in great part in a context of oppression defined as much by presumed "feminists" like Woolf as anyone else.

But it was not so much what I said that mattered as how I felt and acted in response. Guided by the principles cited above I did not see her anger as a personal threat—either to my identity as a white woman or to my assumed authority in the classroom. In fact, though I knew it represented a painful struggle to make sense of her experience within the college, I thought it a good thing. Here was someone passionately aware of what she wanted out of the course, someone who was willing to stake a claim to it. I knew Nellie wouldn't refuse to take risks, and I knew I needed such courage to get close to the material of the course. More significantly for my white students, my lack of fear or, more precisely, my lack of white guilt in the face of Nellie's anger, freed me to answer honestly, to own my responsibilities to the course, and to leave Nellie the freedom to respond as she did.

What guided me in that and succeeding moments was the desire to understand my own responsibility as a white woman living in a racist world. But rather than leave me filled with guilt and a sense of powerlessness, that desire empowered me to struggle to sort out my own complicity with the structures of racism that shaped my relationships to others in my life. In later sessions, when students seemed stuck in a dialectic defined by the guilt and silence of whites on the one hand and the pain and anger of women of color on the other, I sometimes shared these struggles with my students. I explained, for instance, how my own stereotypes of the violent rage of black women, the shamelessness and stupidity of working class people, and the lasciviousness of the "lesbian 'lifestyle'" had impeded my relationships with good friends who are lesbian, working-class and/or of color. I explained how I knew these friends often saw me as typically weak, silent, or blind, acting out of an infuriating sense of my unacknowledged privilege as a white, straight, middle-class woman. Yet, because I was able to distinguish between my part in the creation and proliferation of these stereotypes and my power to actively counter such misinformation. I was able to see ways of resisting such discourses. This could mean a variety of things, from speaking out against such stereotypes to using the privileges accruing to my race or class to challenge institutional and communal forms of exclusion. But perhaps most of all it meant refusing to be defined by those (white and of color) who, for a variety of reasons, would rather I feel less capable.

If all this sounds too confident, too amazingly surefooted and, perhaps for some, too horribly confessional, I believe, now, that it *was* in a sense. But it wasn't without its good effects. My students in that course, both white and of color, welcomed a model of white willingness to struggle with the complexities of racism. Even more, they welcomed a model that held out some promise of a life transformed, where difference didn't necessarily mean permanent separation from others. I remember in particular the shifts in two students' thinking about their identities.

Nellie, whom I mentioned before, had entered the class solely identifying as a woman of color, never acknowledging the class difference that separated her from the other women of color in the class. Elected president of the Students of Color Association, she was driven by a sense of outrage and responsibility for people of color which made her a powerful voice in the classroom and on campus. At the same time, curiously, she had little sense of what her Japanese heritage meant to her. This last she discovered as a consequence of reading Hayslip and Kingston, writers who tell of Asian American women who struggle with their identities. Provided an analysis of identity that was a weave of class and race, sexual orientation and gender, she seemed freed to explore the ways in which her parents' desire for middle-class assimilation had led them to divest her of any strong sense of what being Japanese might actually mean—a form of internalized oppression not entirely distinct from the drive that made her feel responsible for fighting every battle about race on campus. By the end of the course, Nellie was able to recover a sense of joy in her Japanese heritage, as well as a more developed sense of what alliances with working-class students of color on campus might mean for her. She could put down the load for a moment and believe that whether or not others picked it up, she didn't have to do it all, indeed that she couldn't and remain sane.

Similarly, though along different lines, a white middle-class student raised in North Dakota, I'll call her Kate, began to struggle with her relation to the Native American people who had lived at the margins of her life for as long as she could remember. Initially, her response to the work of Crow Dog and Erdrich had been motivated solely by guilt. In our discussions of these texts she recounted painfully the number of times she had been driven through reservations by her parents and instructed directly and indirectly in the inhumanity of the people who lived there. Frozen in her guilt, she was able to appreciate little of the humor or beauty in Erdrich or Crow Dog's work. But given the distinction between guilt and responsibility, she soon began to imagine ways of being an ally to Native Americans. Envisioning this possibility allowed her to see the ways in which Native American life and art are not solely or even primarily defined by oppression. And celebrating the strength of Native life implicit in this fact, she was better able to understand what she wanted to be allied with and for. Like Nellie, she recovered not only a sense of joy in the world and art around her but also a sense of her own power to shape it.

II

I still celebrate those stories. But I no longer see them as I did then, as models of a kind of pedagogy everyone can use. Just three months after teaching the course on literature by women of color, I moved to Jackson, Mississippi, to begin my first tenure-track position at another small liberal arts school, this one located in the heart of the city. Once again, as in my move from Seattle to Iowa, I found myself displaced, a stranger in a strange environment. But much had changed since then, not least my understanding of the dynamics of race and the possibilities and potential forms for engaging it in a literature classroom.

Still, in the first few months, I was hesitant—even frightened—to define the differences in perspective I felt in and out of the classroom. I was committed to making my time and life in Jackson work, despite the negatives that seemed to press in upon me everywhere—from the comments of friends and relatives in the North about this infamous state to the dogma of the religious right that dominated the letters-to-the-editor section of the daily paper. So it was with some relief that I discovered that I was assigned to teach a first semester course called Liberal Studies 1000. The course was part of a new curriculum that stressed critical thinking, interdisciplinarity, and multiculturalism. It would replace the old "freshman comp" course.

I was excited and, as I said, relieved. If there was one thing I knew I could do, it was teach first-semester students. I'd been doing that, I thought to myself, for six years. The syllabus was structured to engage students in analyses of the meaning of a *liberal education*. More specifically, it was designed to get them to tackle questions of identity and difference and the significance of these for defining knowledge and judgment. It seemed right down my alley after years of thinking about the meaning and representation of difference. I knew I was in a new place, but I relied on experience to guide me. What this meant, I was soon to discover, was that I relied on assumptions about students formed in a very different place, with a very different history. Though there were signs along the way, this was made absolutely clear to me as we made our way through the most difficult (in terms of difference) materials of the course: Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

As suggested above, my students in Iowa generally had a kind of faith in the equality of human beings that made it both difficult and easy to discuss issues of race. On the one hand, they were often terrified to acknowledge the presence of racism in their lives, much less the classroom. On the other hand, they wanted desperately to affirm an ethic of equality. For white students this meant democracy, for students of color it meant the dream of equal treatment.

My Southern students—and I call them that, for they came from states ranging from Texas to Florida, most from Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana—generally positioned themselves very differently. For both black and white students, racism and its effects was an old if not well detailed story to them. Growing up in the American South, knowing at least the basic narrative if none of the particulars of the civil rights movement, they much more easily acknowledged and discussed the nature and reality of racism in their lives and in the texts we read. Indeed, they were drawn to the issue, as to an essential aspect of their identities as Southerners. They were, for instance, self-consciously aware that they (black and white) were perceived by Northerners (black and white) as further behind in their consciousness of race, as "backwards."

Yet, that was not the case. In general, they dealt with each other more readily, if often more brutally, than had my Northern students—who were so often afraid of offending or sounding racist or angry. They read Martin Luther King and Richard Wright hungrily, sensing that these writers had answers that would help them make sense of their own lives. Indeed, they brought with them notions of cultural difference—its virtues as well as the ways in which it continued to be used to separate blacks and whites—that it had often taken me an entire semester to bring my midwestern students round to.

Thus the place from which I worked as a teacher, guided by the principles I had brought from the North, was shifted. I continued to believe in the principles I had learned on the anti-racism committee and to offer my students new ways of imagining their relationships to each other, but my certainty about how such possibilities might be lived out was gone. For, in many ways, my students' experience and sense of place generated a discussion of race in which I, as a Northerner, was necessarily an outsider. Again, the stories of two students illustrate my point.

Bill was a white student from a small town in rural Mississippi and the first in his family to attend college. Very early, he made it clear he wasn't too happy about being at the college, either. Present as a consequence of a football scholarship and his father's preference for the reputation of the school over the state university made his resentment of the school apparent by attacking its "liberal" agenda. When issues of race came up, he demonstrated a palpable disdain for the poor blacks in his hometown, rooted in his disapproval of their "refusal" to work. When countered by other students or myself who suggested that such individuals were perhaps products of historical labor practices that excluded and marginalized blacks, he declared that we could only understand his experience if, like him, we had grown up in his hometown. Though Bill's blunt racism conjured that of white supremacists I had read about—North and South—I knew that he had a point, at least so far as I was concerned. Knowledge *is* socially constructed, and though I may have come to different conclusions had I lived in his hometown, I clearly knew so little about what growing up there meant—for whites or blacks—that listening to him took precedence over almost anything I could say.

Omari was a black student from Jackson, the son of a single mother who divides her time teaching political science between a local historically black university and an Ivy League institution in the East. Omari had chosen to go to school in Mississippi rather than depart for the Eastern institutions his mother preferred for him. He explained his decision to me by saying that, despite flagrant experiences of racism on campus, he'd rather stay and "change things" than go somewhere else.

And change things he did. His final inquiry paper explored the nature of institutional racism at the college. In presenting his findings to his classmates, he instructed them in the nature of racism in this community in a way that I could only admire. He spoke as a

Mississippian, as someone who knows what race and class privilege mean as they are constructed here in Jackson. I listened and learned. My students were the principal models: I could only attend to ways in which they might better listen to or hear each other.

While Bill and Omari might seem to represent the history of the South with which most Northerners are familiar, where outspoken white racists stand in virulent opposition to the inspired visions of committed black activists, I know now that such a description would radically distort, reducing the nature of the exchange between them and within the class as a whole. For, despite their radical differences, Bill and Omari shared a kind of experience with racial difference and an understanding of its importance to their sense of identity that I as a white middle-class Northerner have had to struggle to attain. They knew each other well; it was I who was the foreigner. Though I provided the context and safety that allowed the exchange to go forward and could sometimes suggest distinctions or alternatives in my students' discussions, they brought to the class and to their readings an experience of place, of the racial history of the South and of their own inextricable place in it, that positioned them in relation to each other in ways that shifted my notions of my role in the classroom. While they were interested in what I might say, it was always a matter of translatability and hence applicability to their lives in a place I understood too little to be a guide.

In this way, I discovered that the assumptions I made in my early years of teaching were informed by a kind of universalism, a belief that my students would always be recognizable in the terms and forms I, as a consequence of my own experience and sense of place, came equipped with. Instead, I have discovered that the same kind of commitment that has described my struggle to understand racism is required to understand its local expressions. This sounds very abstract, and it is in a sense: we analyze structures in order to make sense of them. But it is also very concrete, for we access such structures only through the narratives with which our students and others in their communities make sense of their lives. Thus, I need to listen closely to the stories my students tell, and do my homework. What are the particular historical structures that shape these stories? How, for instance, has the experience of the poor white Southerner been shaped by the particular and inextricable histories of race and class oppression in Mississippi? What does it mean to be a middle-class black in Jackson today—and one hundred years ago?

My move from North to South has, in this sense, forced upon me a renewed consciousness of the precariousness of knowledge and a new commitment to the local strains of meaning that figure my students' place in the world. To put it simply, multiculturalism isn't something we just find in the books we read; it is something we live. If we want to live it in ways that are productive for ourselves and our students, we have to know the contexts of their lives as well as we know those of our texts.[7]

Notes

1. See Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Bruner (1986).

2. For a recent critique of feminist and postmodern emphases upon "what we do and say for others rather than what we do to ourselves or ask others to do to themselves"(154), see Gore (1993). Gore's work provides a rich theoretical analogue to the more specific examples of practice I offer here.

3. Our work was influenced overwhelmingly by the work—both written and lived—of women of color. Principle among these women were bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Nellie Wong, Toni Cade-Bambara, Angela Davis, Barbara Smith, Merle Woo, Lily Allen, Barbara Love and the late Audre Lorde. Two Jewish women who were especially significant as well were Melanie Kaye-Kantrowitz and the late Ricki Sherover-Marcuse. The writing of many of these women can be found in two invaluable anthologies: *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua and *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldua.

4. The pattern of discussion that best describes my classroom is the "instructional conversation," or IC, in which students are "expected to actively construct their own knowledge and understanding by making connections, building mental schemata, and developing new concepts from previous understandings." Ideally, an IC teacher does not approve or disapprove of students' own ideas, builds on information students provide, and generally guides students to increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding (1992, "Instructional Conversations," *ERIC Digest* [August], ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, D.C. ERIC ED 347 850). For further information on this model see Goldenberg.

5. As Foucault explains, "[T]ruth isn't outside power, or lacking in power; contrary to a myth whose history and functions would reward further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true." See Foucault 1980, p. 131.

6. In a Foucauldian sense, again, one can understand such resistance as the product of clashes between contradictory subject positions or, more simply, the conflict between my students' need to believe in human equality and their fear of racial difference. Thus,though I believe my students are "socially constructed" by "discursive practices," I also believe them to be social agents capable of reflecting upon the relations which constitute them, and consequently of engaging in strategic forms of resistance. For more on resistance from a poststructuralist perspective, see Weedon (1987), Diamond (1988), and Gore, cited above.

7. My thanks go to Jim Hall and Bruce Goebel who organized the 1992 NCTE panel, "Teachers Mediating Differences: Social Dynamics and the Cross-Cultural Classroom," at which an early version of this essay was presented. Thanks, as well, to Steven VanderStaay for critical readings of this work in progress.

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6 Teaching toward a Multicultural Perspective in the Land That Time Forgot

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Eric Sevareid, the late CBS broadcaster and North Dakota native, once commented that, as a boy, he remembered tracing a map of North Dakota and thinking, "Why are we here on the cold, flat top of our country? The meaningless rectangle of Dakota?" (Robinson 1961, 551). Over the years, the Sevareid quote has evolved into something slightly different so that today he is paraphrased as saying, "For the rest of America, North Dakota remains a blank rectangle in people's minds." Sevareid's (mis)quotation(s) and how they affect my own experiences in teaching toward a multicultural perspective are the interlocking subjects of this essay. But before I delve deeply into them, allow me first to fill in a small portion of the rectangle.

I teach English at a small college in Bismarck, North Dakota. Bismarck is an uncongested, unpolluted, suburban community of approximately 45,000. Overall, the state seldom receives attention from the national press. That's because nothing of any perceived negative consequence ever occurs here: no crime waves, no devastating natural catastrophes, no homeless people sleeping on the streets. In short, Bismarck, North Dakota might seem like paradise for anyone living in a typically congested, crime-infested, major American city. But, people from around the country are not exactly flocking to North Dakota. Instead, North Dakotans, and especially its youth, are fleeing in record numbers. Farm foreclosures, the deaths of small towns, and the absence of big industry are all contributing to North Dakota's participation in the twentieth-century phenomenon of urban migration; conversely, these are the reasons why so few people migrate to the state.

You might surmise that these difficulties cause consternation among those who have chosen to stay. But they do not. North Dakotans are a hardy people, and down through the years they have endured much hardship. But their absence of concern runs much deeper than mere stoicism and self-reliance; it is deeply rooted in a cultural provincialism. North Dakotans have become an insular people, isolated by region and, more important, by a belief that the rest of the country's inhabitants are "outsiders." North Dakotans see America as the great unknown, the exotic, the frightening and, therefore, it is a place to distrust, to fear, and even to disavow. In addition, North Dakotans suffer from a collective inferiority complex; in other words, many believe that economically, socially, and culturally, they are, indeed, living inside a "blank and meaningless rectangle."

As a result, combatting their sense of inferiority requires North Dakotans to assume a chauvinistic stance toward the rest of the nation, and it manifests itself in a social aggrandizement that, ironically, has its very roots in cultural diversity. Settlers here were predominantly German Russians who retained their heritage and language for at least two generations. Even today you may visit a small community and hear German freely spoken. However, that heritage now is dying out; television and travel have eroded it to the degree that third and fourth generations have lost their cultural linkage. These have become what Ole Rolvaag, in the last volume of his *Giants in the Earth*, imagined: a homogeneous people who, in their desire to become good Americans, have succeeded in impoverishing their spirits. Or, as the country pastor in the novel puts it,

> If this process of leveling down, of making everybody alike. . . . is allowed to continue, America is doomed to become the most impoverished land spiritually on the face of the earth; Dead will be the hidden life of the heart which is nourished by tradition, the idioms of language, and our attitude to life. (Norris 168)

A tradition does remain, however; it is a mixed residue of an immigrant dream myth, a *Little House on the Prairie* mindset that North Dakotans wear like a shield to mark them as the only remaining moral, friendly, honest, and hardworking people left in America. In short, they strive to embody the mythical past of a simpler, more noble time. Unfortunately, this mindset does not allow for difference; it is akin to a fundamental religion, an illusory faith necessary as a defense against the corruption and corruptibility of an "outsider" America. A spirit remains, then, but it appears to be based not upon cultural strength but upon fear and distrust that serve to blind North Dakotans to any and all nourishment by tradition.

However, North Dakota does not stand alone within the xenophobic nightmare of American history. Multicultural instructors in any region of the country should consider place, its history and heritage, as an integral factor in developing a multicultural course. They may then discover, as I did, that America's cultural xenophobia is the most egregious impediment to maintaining a multicultural perspective in the classroom.

Within the boundaries of both North and South Dakota, there exist ten Native American reservations. Yet one of my colleagues told me, "I don't believe there is any ethnic diversity in North Dakota." When I tell other people that her way of thinking is racist, they counter my assertion by claiming that she is merely ignorant and thoughtless. Which is probably true except, for Native Americans or any nonwhites, her comment, regardless of her conscious or unconscious impulse, is still racist. This disparity in nonwhite and white responses is very telling because it demonstrates that white reaction remains grounded in a kind of mindset that denies the very tenets of multiculturalism. Most white North Dakotans prefer to personalize the text rather than examine the cultural underpinnings of such statements; they have not immersed themselves in a kind of pluralistic thought that, in essence, must push them off their isolating and illusory centers. It also underscores what is all too commonplace in America: wrapped as they are in isolation, aggrandizement, and mythic illusion, many North Dakotans are racists and either don't know it, choose to disavow it, or simply do not take responsibility for it since it is, to their way of thinking, not "done on purpose." In short, the absence of conscious intent provides an absolution of guilt. However, the ever widening fissure between white and nonwhite perceptions in the United States can never begin to contract until people come to terms with the subtle underpinnings of their racist ways of thinking.

Since the level of student resistance to difference is high in the typical North Dakota classroom, going about overtly identifying racism is a counterproductive exercise. I've learned that, in order to expose those years of ingrained, "naturalized" beliefs, the instructor must encourage students to engage in continual dialogue—within themselves and with other students. Only when students begin to understand who they are and why they think the way they do, only when they begin to convey those understandings to others, can they begin to grapple with and grasp some of the essential tenets of multiculturalism.

In order to help students think multiculturally, I immerse them into this dialogue with the understated ideal of achieving the following goals: (1) Students will come to acknowledge cultural, ethnic, and gender difference. (2) Students will develop an understanding of the Other. (3) Students will come to accept cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity. To help accomplish these goals, each student keeps a journal that is both classroom and textbook specific. At the beginning of the semester, I give them a handout that provides a brief overview of journal writing. I stress in my instructions that "journal entries should be thought of as open-ended . . . , always being in a draft stage, always subject to additions and revisions, always open to new ideas and opinions." I also stress that journal writing is for the students' own intellectual development; the more they write about a particular idea, "the more [they] may discover new ideas and new ways to think about those ideas." Often, during the semester, I ask students to share their ideas with the rest of the class. I also encourage them to use their ideas as geneses for formal essays.

Learning to Acknowledge Difference

I would like to focus now on the ideas themselves—how they are generated and how they may evolve—by examining journal entries that respond to readings from the text, *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. I use this text in my English Composition 102 course principally because I agree with the editors' expressed approach:

> The selections in [*Rereading America*] ask students to explore the influences of our culture's dominant myths, our national beliefs about success, race, democracy, and so forth. Each chapter introduces students to perspectives that challenge these deeply held ideals and values, asking them to confront difficult questions and encouraging them to work out their own answers. (vi)

In their journals, any written interpretation or reaction takes the form of reader response. I ask students to explore freely their own beliefs and to work out their own answers by making personal connections to the assigned readings. For Gregory Mantsios's essay, "Class in America: Myths and Realities," which examines the realities and inequities of class structures in America, I ask students to write a profile of themselves at thirty years old. The profiles are strikingly similar, assuming a middle-class perspective, and demonstrating Mantsios's major point that American society is exceedingly class-bound and falls far short of the "anybody can grow up to be president" myth. We read some of the profiles in class and, when we discuss their similarities, many students begin to express difference in American society by recognizing that they are part of this difference. They begin to realize that they are locked into a group that, like their poorer or richer counterparts, is generational and self perpetuating. And they come to acknowledge that Americans are not, nor can they necessarily be, all the same—not all equal, not privy to the myth that success, as Mantsios explains it, "requires no more than hard work, sacrifice, and perseverance" (74).

Above all else, the notion that everyone is free to choose who and what they wish to be remains a major belief for my students. At the beginning of the semester, I ask students to respond to this question: "What does it mean to you to be an American?" Invariably, their responses replicate this typical journal entry:

> Being an American to me means freedom, being able to choose what I want to do. I guess it means both feeling secure and independent.

In my classes, students vote on the chapters they would prefer to read and, without fail, each time they choose first to read "Women and Men in Relationship: Myths of Gender." Thanks to my students, I am given another way to demonstrate differences between myth and reality, between their monolithic belief regarding American freedom and the reality of gender inequity. Following my question about what it means to be an American, I assign Janet Saltzman Chafetz's essay, "Some Individual Costs of Gender Role Conformity," and ask students to respond to a text question: "Write a journal entry about a time when your definition of your own gender came into conflict with the roles prescribed by your family, culture, or religion. How did you deal with this conflict?" (201). Again their responses replicate each other in that they contradict their own previous journal entries. The same student who wrote that being an American meant "being able to choose what I want to do," recorded this response:

> My whole family is gender biased, for as long as I can remember it's always been the female who does the majority of cooking, the laundry and the housework. The female has always been inferior to the male in my family, and there has always been double standards.

She later remarks in her entry that when she complains to her parents, she "[gets] the short end of the stick because [she is] female." Clearly, she has not been allowed the freedom to choose. However, unless I discuss with students these kinds of contradictions, they seldom make connections on their own. In order for students to acknowledge cultural difference, it is important, then, for the instructor to allow time to examine various social and cultural constructs.

I do a similar reading and journal exercise when students examine the chapter, "Harmony at Home: The Myth of the Model Family." In this case, I put students in groups and ask them to compose an extended definition for the American family. Generally, I receive myriad abstract definitions that describe families who are enveloped in media-driven images about "sharing, caring, and unconditional love." However, the journal entries describing their own families often provide a more realistic picture—one that is disturbing to the degree that, on occasion, I've consulted privately with students concerning their own turbulent home lives.

Ultimately, the essays in *Rereading America*, coupled with students' journal entries and with class discussion, provide a critical foundation for students as they begin to acknowledge difference within what they had initially perceived as their own homogeneously constructed culture. It has its drawbacks, of course, because myths, be they true or false, may provide direction and motivation in one's life. It is sometimes difficult for students to encounter realities; they want to believe the myths. Nonetheless, as their master narratives begin to dissolve, I am afforded a crucial opening into furthering students' multicultural perspectives by examining how their new-found sense of difference is part of a structured relationship that connects them to other groups. I want students to see that, as Joan Wallace Scott puts it, "No group is without connection or relation to any other, even if these are because who and what I am has something to do with how I am differentiated from them" (40).

While students begin to express difference in their individual responses, they also begin to acknowledge similarities when they share their responses with each other. There exists a shared history in their similar beliefs; as one student wrote, "I guess my parents raised me the way they learned from their own parents, and on and on, and that's what happens to all of us which will probably never change either." This shared history, diminished as it continues to be by consumer capitalism and the myth of American individualism, pulls students outside of themselves, offering them an opportunity to recognize the reality of cultural construction, while affording me the chance to introduce them to, and help them to understand, the value of cultural tradition and group identity.

Encountering Cultural Heritage

Each of them has an immigrant heritage; they need only to contact their relatives to uncover that heritage. I stress the word "uncover," because what surprises me—although I guess it should not, ensconced as Americans have been in the melting pot myth and in their current postmodern media reality—is that only a handful of students know anything about their family histories. Some students seem timorous when they first assume the task, uncertain about how to proceed, perhaps, but also unwilling, I believe, to encounter their heritage and thus somehow denigrate their own "American" culture. For instance, some will comment, "It doesn't affect me now, so I didn't see the point of finding out about where my family came from." Others simply write, "My family hasn't done anything too interesting, they just farmed and tried to make some money."

But in spite of some hesitancy, most students do seem eager to assume this task; they wish to seek an identity and a place in the world. Most of their family biographies stress the hardships, both physical and economic, that their progenitors encountered. It is the stuff of pioneer myth, sprinkled here and there with occasional marital scandal and criminal mischief. As students share these biographies in the classroom, I focus upon incidents of discrimination and ostracism that may be woven into the fabric of their families' lives. In the process, students often begin to uncover behaviors and beliefs that, while at first seem different from their own, still remain as subtle components of their identities. For instance, one student uncovered that both her maternal and paternal great grandparents emigrated from Ireland in the mid-1800s. In her journal, she wrote,

> My mother told me that each couple came to America because they were Protestant and tired of religious battles. All my grandparents hated Catholics, she said. None of their descendants on either side dared marry a Catholic.

During the subsequent class discussion, the student commented that she knew now why she had been scolded by her grandmother for playing with the girls at the local Catholic school. It is interesting to note that students are seldom surprised when they hear these not uncommon stories of religious conflict. Many journal entries tell of parents who have denied or continue to discourage their children from associating with or dating either Protestants or Catholics.

These kinds of stories, and the subsequent discussions about them, help to magnify student perception of cultural tradition and, most important, of the role that difference and diversity have played and continue to play in their own lives. Another student wrote,

> I asked my mother where our Italian blood came from, but she said she wasn't sure. I couldn't find out because all my grandparents are dead, but I know sometimes it's been a problem for me because I've got black hair and look different than most people around North Dakota. I've even been called a 'wop,' which seems pretty stupid to me, most of my relations were English and French.

After reading his entry, most listeners expressed amazement that he would be singled out, although some acknowledged that he did look "different." The student told the class that he would rather live somewhere else than in North Dakota and was considering enrolling at a college "somewhere in New York City" because, as he said, "I would probably blend in better there."

Another student wrote that her family moved to a small community which is inhabited by peoples of strong German Russian heritage:

> We were never accepted by the community. I remember when I was in high school my dad was complaining because he was tired of always feeling like an outsider. Our family didn't know how to speak German. . . . I didn't have many friends growing up, everybody seemed so suspicious of us, and I couldn't wait to leave that town. The problem with small towns is that nobody wants to change anything, all they want to do is keep everybody out. I think the happiest day of my life was when my dad found a job in Bismarck.

This kind of entry, when shared with the class, always opens a floodgate of small-town examples of ostracism and bigotry and demonstrates the outsider mentality that continues to deny diversity and to sustain cultural and economic inertia in North Dakota.

Examining Diversity and Tension in American Life

As students share their histories, I provide examples of how immigrant diversity continues in American culture in spite of, or perhaps because of, hardship, discrimination, and social deprivation. Many students come to the logical conclusion that diversity, with its accompanying history of cultural and social conflict, has always been and continues to be a strong component in American life. They no longer deny that they live in a multicultural society. However, fact, coupled with the absence of denial, does not necessarily assure the acceptance of difference.

It would appear to be a short step for students from acknowledging and understanding their own group identities to acknowledging and understanding the identities of other less familiar groups. Ironically, but not illogically, that path has been plowed under by the same longstanding, generationally ingrained prejudices of the students' own progenitors. To uncover these prejudices, I choose to concentrate upon Native American culture because, generally speaking, it is the one culture that North Dakota students seem the most unwilling to acknowledge, understand, or accept.

In the relative absence of other nonwhite cultures in North Dakota, my students suffer a malady that I call the "Familiarity Breeds Contempt Syndrome." When discussing any racial or ethnic group other than Native Americans, many North Dakota students seem receptive, open-minded, and sympathetic. However, when the topic turns to Native Americans, the discussion is often tinged with hostility, defensiveness, and racial stereotyping. For most white North Dakotans, Native Americans are the one cultural group in America that presents them with "hierarchical, conflicted, and contradictory relationships" (Scott 1991, 43).

There are myriad reasons why these conflicts and contradictions persist, most of which, on the surface, appear to be generated by class/economic disparity and its resultant resentments. When I ask students to write out a general reaction to an excerpt from *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, I frequently receive responses like this one:

> I'm getting sick of all these Indians complaining about the white man taking their land, or about equal rights. Today's society has opportunities for every walk of life. But in my eyes I see the Indians just wasting space around us. I can't see why we are paying these people to play bingo or to lay around [in] parks. I work my ass off to support myself. I don't really feel like paying taxes so some Indian can go play bingo. I know the system isn't fair but why should the hard working group of America pay for the lazy people?

First and foremost, nearly all of my students believe that their middle-class way of life is the appropriate and, therefore, the only way to live. Like the above response, any difference that does not include traditional, Puritan values is suspect. Some student values, of course, have a rhetorical foundation, primarily implanted by their families, but not entirely practiced, as evidenced by their noticeable laxity in discipline and motivation. Overall, though, there is a "right" way to conduct one's affairs—and a "wrong" way.

For most of my students, the "wrong" way is reinforced by two predominating variables. The most obvious variable is that long-standing anecdotal phenomenon which permeates the master narrative; it is what I call the "Ten Drunks on the Street Corner" phenomenon: if a white person sees ten drunks standing on the street corner, one of whom happens to be an Indian, invariably he or she will only point out the drunken Indian. And in spite of the number of facts and statistics that one hurls at students to counteract the stereotypes, little can sway them from their fundamental belief that *all* Native Americans are lazy, drunk, and living off the government. The other and, undoubtedly, the most pervasive variable is the heretofore mentioned Puritan value system which on the surface appears laden with compassionate and charitable impulses, but more often than not inspires, in thought and deed, a rigid denial of and even a hatred for any hint of difference.

The combination of these two variables can be deadly when attempting to establish any kind of meaningful dialogue. Like the above student response, one must come to expect the resultant diatribes that ensue and sometimes conclude that it is futile to conduct a fruitful examination with anyone who is firmly inculcated with Christian, assimilationist beliefs. Still, it is important that students address these conflicts and their concerns about them, not as a means necessarily to resolve them, but as a means to arrive at some avenue for coexistence.

These discussions—discussions which, predictably, place the onus of responsibility on Native Americans, or as one journal writer put it, "the Indians have drug this business of us stealing their land out too much and should stop their damn complaining"—demonstrate to students that communities in a pluralistic America will not always adhere to a simple conformist formula. Or as Joan Wallace Scott points out, "Conflict and contest are inherent in communities of difference. There must be ground rules for coexistence that do not presume the resolution of conflict and the discovery of consensus" (43).

To proceed, then, one must show students that cultural difference remains unresolvable—and necessarily so. A daunting task, perhaps, within an almost exclusively white, middle-class classroom. I begin by having students read and respond in their journals to the aforementioned excerpt from *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, entitled in *Rereading America* as, "Talking to the Owls and Butterflies." In the excerpt, Lame Deer speaks of the traditional Indian view of nature and culture in opposition to the Western view: "You have raped and violated these lands, always saying, 'Gimme, gimme, gimme,' and never giving anything back" (128). Lame Deer goes on to say, "We have a new joke on the reservation: 'What is cultural deprivation?' Answer: 'Being an upper middle-class white kid living in a split-level suburban home with a color TV'" (129–30). Very inflammatory stuff, this, in the context which gave rise to the preceding journal entries. However, there is always a cadre of students who respond positively. Some comment that "it is good to look at other cultures," or that they "agree that we don't pay enough attention to nature," or, better still, "I think the guy is right, we have to learn to slow down and learn from other cultures about better ways to live." These responses signify a potential opening toward coexistence, and in subsequent class discussions I ask them to share their responses as a means of demonstrating how we might choose to acknowledge and, thus, coexist with another culture. That is, the traditional Native American ways, although undermined by modern social maladies, still contain something irreducible, an avenue of knowledge that, while seemingly antithetical to Western progressivist thought, may address students' needs for social and ecological balance and restraint.

Other selections from *Rereading America* also contribute to opening avenues for coexistence. For instance, in an excerpt from *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*, Shelby Steele writes,

> Our innocence always inflates us and deflates those we seek power over. Once inflated we are entitled; we are in fact licensed to go after the power our innocence tells us we deserve. In this sense, *innocence is power.* (350)

Isolated as they are in time and space, North Dakota students are exceedingly convinced of their own innocence and, in their general reactions to Lame Deer's essay, they profess that innocence in fairly uniform ways. The most common example is what I call the "Absolution by Historical Absence" response:

> I think that the Indians feel sorry for themselves and what the white man did to their lives so they blame it on us. But all that happened a long time ago so why don't they just forget it and move on.

Another example, similar to the previous "I'm getting sick of all these Indians complaining" response, but even more prevalent now in "backlash America," is what I call the "Absolution by Obverse Oppression" response:

> I'll sit here for $6\frac{1}{2}$ more years smelling good, eating fake food. . . . For the next few years I'll enjoy myself in my 'rotten' life of oppression because in the end I know I will win. And one last thing before I go, Chief, I'll win with the lights on.

Or consider this "innocent" response:

> The difference is inside—the mind and actions of the person, not the skin color. My black brother-in-law, Willie, grew up in the slums of Chicago, but he managed to end up in Montana, and he overcame all that to acquire the American Dream—a house, kids, wife, job.

This example demonstrates what Steele calls the bargaining position whereby white society accepts nonwhites and thereby presumes their own racial innocence if nonwhites present themselves as "the remarkable Huxtable family—with its doctor/lawyer/parent combination, its drug-free, college-bound children, and its wise yet youthful grandparents—. . . a blackface version of the American dream" (353).

In the perceived sameness of North Dakota culture, it is often difficult to speak to the impasse that innocence and bargaining engender, but Steele's excerpt provides something of an antidote, especially when he stresses that such innocence and bargaining only serve to heighten the dangers of perpetuating a permanent underclass. Thus, after responding to the Lame Deer reading and the Steele excerpt, and then sharing journal examples of innocence and bargaining, some students are at least willing to acknowledge the necessity of doing "something," especially when I point out that, by the year 2020, people of color will constitute the majority in the United States.

For most students, however, I need to pursue the bargaining position, to play into their innocence by having students read various newspaper and magazine articles that demonstrate Native American resolve to dispel images that have been perpetuated in myth and media. For instance, in a *Bismarck Tribune* column, "Four Directions," Cheryl Red Eagle points out that the "drunken Indian" stereotype is a false myth, that "45 percent of Native Americans abstain altogether from drinking alcohol" (4b). Red Eagle supports this statistic by describing various tribes, such as the Shuswap who, over the last few years, have achieved and continue to maintain a 98 percent sobriety rate. Another article that students read, entitled

"Shadow of a Nation," describes the struggles of an ill-fated, high school basketball star, Jonathan Takes Enemy, as he attempts, and eventually succeeds in, negotiating through his bicultural world.

Of course many students recognize these types of accomplishments as a reinforcement of their "right" and "innocent" view of an assimilationist world. For some, then, this bargaining approach moves them back into their isolating positions. For the longest time I rationalized that, in spite of students' retrenchment, it was still some kind of opening, still a way to maintain students' interest and receptivity. But I always felt that my effort was only partially effective, and so within the last few years I have been striving to move beyond this bargaining approach.

Accepting Difference

One way to demonstrate coexistence and to encourage acceptance of difference is in the reading of Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Ceremony*. Silko has structured her novel to show that both whites and Native Americans are to blame—and not. She does this by infusing the realistic narrative with the mythical story of the witch people who have set loose "the destroyers" to devour both white and Indian peoples: "The destroyers [have] tricked the white people as completely as they [have] fooled the Indians" (204), so that the traditional values in both cultures have dissolved, leaving both to fear possibilities and change. While this design may seem like a kind of absolution by innocence, it is not; for Silko shows, through Tayo and through his journey toward self discovery, that one must take responsibility in acknowledging those forces or "destroyers" who are keeping both whites and Native Americans estranged from themselves and from each other. As the medicine man, Betonie, puts it, "They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction" (132).

When students first begin reading *Ceremony*, they tend to make predictable comments, stating that the novel exposes the injustices against Native Americans, or that the text is composed of primarily binary oppositions, as in "us versus them" or in "victims versus victimizers." These are valid readings; but to open them out, I ask students to respond to a variety of journal questions that focus upon the loss of tradition and community and upon the need for change and coexistence.

For instance, I ask students to describe in their journals various characters who embody this loss, and in class we share ideas about what they have lost, why they have experienced loss, and what that loss means to them and to the community. I ask students to identify the "destroyers" and to explain how they are destroying both nonwhite and white cultures. But before I let them respond to this exercise, I give students a short lecture on language as metaphor so as to inspire some creativity among them. I always find their responses interesting because, while students are able to conclude that the destroyers are the purveyors of cultural degradation through such dehumanizing mechanisms as capitalism, technology, and even Christianity, they always express frustration or dissatisfaction in their attempts to identify the destroyers. Which is precisely the point; in transcending any real-world referent, the mythical stories in the novel underscore the open-ended power of imagining possibilities and change.

Examining the stories provides a good transition toward an understanding of Betonie. In their journals, students explain how they think Betonie functions in the novel and generally they identify him as not only a guide for Tayo, but also as a spokesman for, and an embodiment of, cultural synthesis and coexistence. Of course, I also ask students to explain what Tayo is learning and, ultimately, has learned on his quest. By the time we finish the novel, many students have moved beyond the binaries, preferring instead to favor a more fluid response. They recognize that it is not "them" or "us" who need to take responsibility but "all" who must share in the acknowledgement and acceptance of the lies and the false myths of "the destroyers" who, as Tayo comes to realize, will "finally destroy the world: the starving against the fat, the colored against the white" (191). This destruction springs from the very same "barrenness" of spirit and tradition that Rolvaag speaks to, and to what Tayo now believes is "shriveled like a seed hoarded too long, shrunken past its time, and split open now, to expose a fragile, pale leaf stem, perfectly formed and dead" (204).

I like to believe that after completing the entire course, students have become like the seed, "split open now"; but unlike the leaf stem, they are neither perfectly formed nor dead, simply awakened and responsive to difference and to possibilities for coexistence. Perhaps now some of them cannot with confidence think of Native Americans, or any people of color, in the same chauvinistic, racist ways that they had previously learned to accept. Perhaps now some of them have learned that our state and our nation have much to offer in the way of diversity, and that now is the time to fill in the "barren rectangle in people's minds."

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7 "Don't Teach It to Us; Teach It to Them": Teaching Cross-Cultural Literature to a Multicultural Class

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In the Spring Semester of 1992, a senior college of the City University of New York began an experimental first-year seminar designed to introduce a multicultural student population to the nature of a liberal arts education using cross-cultural texts. Our student body is two-thirds female, approximately 40 percent Latino and 30 percent Black (including Africans, African Americans, and African Caribbeans). The remainder come from various Asian and European communities. The course, entitled "The Liberal Arts in a World of Diversity," was designed to fill the academic and personal needs of first-year students by providing a supportive environment and an epistemological framework for understanding the curriculum upon which they were embarking, the academic community into which they were entering, and the pluralistic experience in which they were being expected to function. In its basic design the course included readings on the concept of a liberal arts education, on educational choices and ethnic identity, on defining one's own identity, and on the challenges facing institutions changing curricula in an increasingly multicultural society.

The course design required that students be given a chance to observe the basic concepts in practice through a team-teaching approach. Each section was taught both by a counselor, who brought to the classroom interest and experience in helping students understand the affective behaviors that can result in success or failure, and by an academic advisor, who brought to the classroom interest and experience in curricular choices and in academic study skills that can affect performance. Each team reflected these basic differences in perspective; each team included people of different ethnicities and genders.

Two semesters of experience in teaching this course have raised a number of serious questions for us. Despite years of experience teaching classes with highly diverse populations and despite our belief in our own understanding of our students and their needs, we were often surprised at their responses to the material and the concepts of the course. Despite a firm sense of ourselves as classroom teachers, we were often challenged by our reactions to each other and by our different experiences of the same class hour. We entered this experiment knowing that teaching cross-cultural texts in a multicultural classroom is a complex endeavor; we discovered and were surprised by the depths of that complexity. Rather than verifying a series of myths—(1) reading works by minority writers helps to bring minority students to voice, (2) including cross-cultural texts helps students feel welcome in the academic community, (3) learning about one's own culture fosters openness toward other cultures, and (4) understanding one's cultural identity helps establish an ability to function in the larger society—our experience has raised questions and forced us to rethink our approach. It has challenged our complaisance. We have come to believe that for such an endeavor to be successful, instructors need to confront themselves, prepare for unexpected resistance, and analyze materials not only from the perspective of their own discipline but also from the context of their students' histories and cultures.

Who Are We?

Paul G. Kreuzer

I am a White male. My field is English, and I teach both composition and literature; my dissertation was on Jane Austen's narrative techniques. I am an academic advisor, and I am responsible for the office that enforces academic standards and the rules and regulations of the college. If that is all the information I were to give about myself, one might extrapolate that I must be conservative, that I must adhere to the old canon, that I am probably elitist. But, I am not a WASP—whatever that is; my Jewish background enables me, though I identify most with Eastern European sensibilities, to pass for any Mediterranean ethnicity. I have thus been subjected to various slurs for being Italian, Greek, Latino, Arab (I am, for example, routinely frisked at airport checkpoints). I am single and in my forties, which makes my sexual orientation a matter of speculation. My politics tend toward the liberal, my critical approach to literature toward the feminist. I have long been an advocate for expanding the canon and incorporating multicultural perspectives into the

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curriculum. Among those who do not know me, I am equally described as radical or reactionary.

Although I chaired the committee that designed the course and planned from the beginning to be teamed with one of the others on the committee, when the actual teams were assigned, I was paired with Doris for a variety of practical reasons. We had met each other occasionally over the past few years, but we certainly did not know one another well. My initial reaction to the team was that it would be a challenge and that the students would certainly get to see different perspectives. I thought we could probably work well together as I knew of Doris's reputation for hard work and concern for students as well as of my own previous successes team teaching with several very different partners. On the other hand, I saw potential for real conflict. During a student uprising a few years ago, we saw things from very different viewpoints. I believed that Doris was far more radical than I and that her politics were inflammatory. I was perfectly willing, to believe that she would bring to the classroom views that would be racially and ethnically divisive. Given the purpose of the course, perhaps we were a team made in heaven; perhaps we would just explode.

Doris Correa Capello

I greeted the invitation to teach this course with enthusiasm. As I looked forward to engaging students and myself in discussions on critical issues in higher education, I reviewed the current discourse on multicultural education. Here, I thought, was an opportunity to explore with students their ideas on a multitude of areas that had direct impact on their lives.

For many years I had worked in communities described in the literature as dysfunctional and pathological. My own experience in these communities proved otherwise. They were vibrant and active, and the men and women who defined these communities were struggling against tremendous odds. My own research with Puerto Rican and Black women documented the strengths of women in situations that were daunting.

Our students are products of these communities. As a Puerto Rican I also was a product, not only of this community, but also of this college. Issues regarding the inclusion of our history, literature, and culture in the curriculum; of recruitment and retention; of scholarship and research on communities of color were of concern to me, and I looked forward to lively classroom discussions with students and colleagues.

When I was informed that I would be team teaching with a White male instructor, I felt my job would be more difficult because I anticipated having to "educate" this person about issues I felt were important for students in this multicultural environment.

As a woman of color I also had on other occasions to deal with issues of legitimacy in classes where the majority of students were White. The dynamics that occur around issues of authority, expertise, and knowledge of content can create difficulties which need to be discussed and clarified early in the semester. And finally, the fact that I am a female teamed with a White male who could operate out of the context of unearned privilege and who is traditionally seen as the authority in the classroom also was of concern to me. This last issue is particularly important because the majority of our students are people of color, but the majority of faculty on our campus are White males. As a Latina faculty member I was definitely in the minority. Had I been in a more traditional discipline, these issues might not have seemed so central to me. However, my training in social work and group dynamics and my role as a counselor on campus highlighted the difficulties that could be anticipated. Despite these concerns about privilege, authority, and potential insensitivity to people of color, I meant to have this course work and to make it as stimulating and meaningful for the students and myself as possible.

In retrospect, some of my fears were confirmed, others never materialized; new concerns arose. As we describe our experiences using specific examples from the readings and anecdotes of the students' reactions to material presented in class, we demonstrate the parallels that exist between our concerns and fears and those of the students. The classroom dynamics we describe occurred on many levels, and often we were unprepared for and surprised by what happened in the classroom.

Texts, Concepts, Reactions

The overall goal of the course was to enable students to understand the liberal arts curriculum of the college and to help them develop strategies for making appropriate personal choices in those parts of the curriculum in which students are allowed choice. Equally important were the goals of helping students come to an understanding of the demands of a multicultural society and of introducing them to academic texts that would help them address these demands. Finally, the course was to help students understand the national debate over the concept of inclusive curricula so they would be prepared to enter into future college-wide discussions about revising our curriculum. The course also included material on study and research skills and culminated in a community-based research project. Our focus here, however, is on the experience of teaching the cross-cultural material.

Selections from John Henry, Cardinal Newman's The Idea of a University

In a course centered on cross-cultural texts, it might seem odd that the committee that designed the course decided to begin with about twenty pages selected from *Discourses V, VI,* and *VII* of Cardinal Newman's dense Victorian prose. A discussion of diversity, however, was only one of the goals in the course design. Equally important was a discussion of the nature of a liberal arts education, of the philosophical point of view that characterizes American higher education in the second half of the twentieth century.

Assigning something as difficult as Newman to first-year students is always a gamble. The language is unfamiliar, the argument dense. It's hard to predict if students will be irritated or pleased. Paul was used to approaching the text from a literary perspective—decoding difficult sentence structures and analyzing the argument. Doris deconstructed the concepts noting societal biases about class and gender. In order to present the work, we provided study questions and asked the students to prepare for class by working on the questions in groups. These questions addressed both approaches. Throughout the course we used our different interpretations and views of the readings to try to help students learn to analyze critically, to recognize the complexity of possible interpretation, to develop different kinds of strategies for analysis. While enriching our students' intellectual development, this approach forced us to grapple with complexities brought out in the class discussions.

The questions focused on defining the nature of knowledge and on making a distinction between learning for learning's sake rather than for economic gain. Because Newman argues for an "inclusive" approach to designing a university, we used this most traditional writer to introduce the concepts of observing from multiple perspectives, of comparative analysis, and of discovery of ideas through broad exploration. The piece was chosen to establish a theoretical groundwork for understanding the concept of a liberal arts education and, oddly and unexpectedly, the concept of multiculturalism as an educational principle. Because Newman argues for reasoning from comparative viewpoints of different disciplines, his argument may be read as a metaphor for understanding from the perspectives of differing cultures. At the same time we were able to point out the inherent sexism of Newman's nineteenth-century British culture. He does, after all, speak only about the education of boys and young men, and he includes many statements that demonstrate class prejudices.

The response in both semesters was surprising. We really expected to be pulling teeth in class discussions, but by admitting ourselves the difficulty of reading this text and by assigning advance study groups, the class came already immersed in a discussion. They seemed genuinely pleased at being expected to read this material and in our faith that they could understand it. They readily saw the paradox of the inclusiveness of Newman's university and his own classism and sexism.

We did not understand that for many of our students the experience of reading Newman solidified their expectations and definition of traditional college work as somehow separate and isolated from their own communities. We did not recognize that their pleasure at being invited into the "traditional academic world" derived to a large extent from their sense of themselves as "college students," as "one of them." Many saw the ability to enter into a world in which Newman could be discussed as a chance to leave behind the communities in which they lived. At the same time, however, many of the same students expressed frustration at what they believed was a general devaluation of their own communities in their perception of the values espoused by "the college community."

James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers"

One of the complexities that arose in class discussions was the concept of community. We (the instructors) understood community as operating on different levels. There are multiple communities in which we all exist. Within these communities there are points of resistance as well as nurturance. Communities are in constant flux creating and recreating themselves. This circular process enables individuals to contribute to as well as draw from their communities' strengths with which to survive. Our communities act to affirm and validate who we are as productive members of our society.

For our students, the concept of community includes a physical space bounded by distinct geographic boundaries and shared identity with other people who are of the same ethnic or racial group. Although New York City is often portrayed as an international metropolis, in reality there exists de facto segregation. There are areas of the city in which the majority of residents are of one racial/ethnic group. For example, West Harlem is predominantly African American, but East Harlem, although predominantly Puerto Rican, also includes small pockets of White ethnics. The Upper Westside in Manhattan, often referred to as Little Quisqueya, is predominantly Dominican.

One of the first readings assigned to the class was a short piece by James Baldwin titled, "A Talk to Teachers." Written in the 1960s and dealing with the complexity of racial identity formation in a country that has a history of racial oppression for communities of color, this essay advises teachers about the need to understand racial diversity, the process of racial identity formation, and the effect of ignoring whole segments of the community in school curricula. In it Baldwin describes his own painful childhood journey down Park Avenue in New York from poor Black Harlem to the rich White Upper East Side.

Around the time we discussed this article in class, the first Rodney King trial had concluded and Los Angeles was in the midst of riots among the worst in the history of this country. Class discussions were heated and centered around who was to blame for the violence occurring in that community. Students who in the past had been reticent in class discussion contributed their analyses of the situation. They were able to see the manipulation by the media of events that were occurring. Images of people of color looting and attacking Whites were repeatedly flashed on the screen. The students clearly saw this as another way of criminalizing these communities. White students in the class would go back to the footage of the White truck driver who was forcibly removed from his truck and almost beaten to death. However, it was not shown on television that it was other Blacks who rescued this man and took him to the hospital. The Black students were angry that only negative images of Blacks were flashed on TV and concluded that not much had changed since the 1960s when Baldwin wrote his essay. They understood Baldwin's point to teachers that violence might be the result of continued exclusion of African Americans from the curriculum, but they did not immediately grasp that the Los Angeles riots were a related event.

During class discussion two of our students revealed incidents of racially motivated, physical violence that they had experienced. The contexts of the incidents were discussed, and it became obvious that the anger felt by both the White student and the Black student was based more on the inability to deal with the general violence felt in our city and our society than on the individual incidents. While students recognized that both White and Black racism have played a significant part in their communities, they were able to speak to the futility of violence as a means of correcting past injustices. Although the majority of students refused to accept violence as a means to an end and condemned people for burning down their own neighborhoods, one student argued that on some occasions frustration can lead to violence and speculated that on some occasions acts of violence can function as safety valves to prevent even greater destruction.

The concept of violence became broader for the students as we began to show how violence is manifested in many different ways, such as poor housing, unequal educational resources and opportunities, sexism and homophobia, and countless other ways that prevent individuals and groups from reaching their goals and potential. It was important to historicize the events that were unfolding before their eyes and share with each other their individual experiences as well as the group history and experience in dealing with racism. Students began to recognize the relationship between their individual experiences and the history of injustice and racism in the nation.

It was through the discussion of multicultural texts that we could begin to understand each other and each other's history and contributions. Students were encouraged to see that they were evolving and creating a new community as well as merging into an existing college community. As members of this new community they also could contribute to and shape the future of higher education and of this nation. They were active participants in, not passive recipients of, their education. For the individuals responsible for imparting education to future generations, Baldwin's essay frames the question of the meaning of this education. In discussion we were painfully aware that education for our students had not been inclusive, and as the riots of Los Angeles demonstrated, many groups have been marginalized in this society. Although many of our students were aware of the consequences and benefits of the Civil Rights Act passed before they were born, the Los Angeles experience as well as their daily lives proved that much more has to be accomplished to bring people of color from the margin to the center. Issues not only of race, but also of class, gender, and sexual orientation impede the development of their potential.

One Latino student shared an anecdote about his cousin who attended a predominantly White institution. After graduation, this cousin did not wish to speak Spanish and "acted White." Our student resented his cousin deeply, but on other occasions expressed pride in being a college student, in being different from some of his friends. In articulating his goal of achieving a degree as a means of upward mobility, he also expressed conflict about what this education would make him become.

By introducing texts that were written by and about people of color, we hoped to give students a sense of possession of their right to be part of and to contribute to the creation of this new academic community. The discussion of Baldwin proceeded, to a large extent, according to plan. Students understood the nature of racism and could grasp how racism can influence school curricula in subtle and powerful ways. As one student was finishing explaining his library research on Baldwin to the class, he mentioned Baldwin's homosexuality. We were barraged with comments like, "then why should we read him?" and "homosexuality isn't part of diversity—it's wrong." Although not all students expressed these opinions, we were unexpectedly confronted with virulent homophobia and an unwillingness to consider the idea critically. Once Baldwin's sexuality was known, some students wished to dismiss him completely. To provoke the discussion further, Doris, who is married with children, asked, "If I were to tell you that in addition to being Puerto Rican, I am also a lesbian, what would you say?" She was told, point blank, by one student that she would be a disgrace to her community. Suddenly it was clear—when challenged at all, community for some of our students is monolithic. When confronted with the issue of sexual orientation, many of the students retreated into very simplistic definitions of ethnic identity. And yet one devoutly Christian Black Latina quietly but forcefully argued for tolerance and respect for the differences of others even within communities that may be suspicious of difference. After hearing her voice, we knew we could not ignore the problem, and so we decided to teach two essays by Michelle Cliff.

Michelle Cliff, "A Journey into Speech" and "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire"

We moved from Baldwin to Michelle Cliff and used her essays, "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire" and "A Journey into Speech," to demonstrate further the complexities of marginalization and community identification. Cliff's essays clearly articulate the complexity of community identity as she writes about her multiple selves. She is a Jamaican but has fair skin and "tall hair" which separates her from other Jamaicans of darker complexion; she was educated by the British thereby receiving a "superior" education to that of her best friend who goes to the local public school; she has spent years living in Europe; she is a lesbian, but her male friends attempt to seduce her. Her fragmented identity creates tensions as she tries to develop a community among the various people with whom she lives and associates.

The two pieces exemplify the fragmentation inherent in a diverse society. We wanted to teach the two essays because the first, "A Journey into Speech," is typically academic, structured as a standard English essay, written in Standard English. The second traces Cliff's process in finding her own fragmented voice, her African and Caribbean rhythms and logic patterns, her anger, and her passion. We hoped class discussion would lead to some freeing of those students who seemed reluctant to speak and write, by making the conflict explicit. Because many of our students were the first in their families to attend college, for many of them the concept of college was new, and they struggled to identify themselves with this college community. Although the college was a space they wished to inhabit, they were also fearful of the changes that would occur once they began to invest their energy and emotion in campus life.

And so we talked about Cliff; about European schooling and speaking different Englishes; about reconciling one's sexuality with the attitudes of one's home "culture"; about living in countries with cultures that have developed out of different groups and classes; of the similarity of Jamaica's combination of British and African influences and the resultant destruction of the native Caribbean culture, with the United States' combination of countless immigrant populations and the destruction of their native cultures. We thought our young Latina student from the Dominican Republic, whose dark complexion and lack of any Spanish accent enabled most to "peg" her incorrectly as West Indian, would talk about her fragmentation. We tried to ask our student whose cousin no longer spoke Spanish to talk about the conflict between the home community and the college community. We tried to ask our students from St. Kitts about being classified as Jamaican, and we tried to ask our African Americans about their perceived differences from Africans and from African Caribbeans. We talked about the freedom of being able to talk uninhibitedly, a freedom of utmost importance to Cliff. And we were met with silence. Our students, many of whom were, through Newman and through Baldwin, coming to an academic voice, to a Western voice, to a European voice, were effectively silenced by our attempt to respect the various parts of their whole selves. For many of our students the complexity of multiple identities, of fluency in multiple voices, of participation in multiple communities was overwhelming. Our attempts through these writings to ease the transition, to make explicit and understandable the conflicts, became threatening. Some students retreated into comfortable "home" behaviors, while others rejected their own cultures. For example, one student who expressed great pride in being a college student insisted upon dressing in his neighborhood "hip-hop" costume. He arrived in class late, sporting earrings in both ears that were vaguely hidden under his knitted hat. When discussion turned toward the issue of sexism, his body movements became aggressively "macho." One Latina student who dressed "fashionably," criticized another young Latina for acting White, for rejecting her culture and denying her existence as a tenant in the local public housing project. To a certain extent, the accusations were accurate because the student did not publicize her address or flaunt her ethnicity. And yet she was beginning to learn to identify with her own community and was no longer taking pride in being assumed to be White. A few recognized and appreciated the complexity and began to experiment using multiple voices.

Sandra Cisneros, The House on Mango Street *and* *Nicholasa Mohr,* Rituals of Survival: A Woman's Portfolio

The issue of coming to voice for some of our students was particularly painful. The civil rights movement and Black History Month celebrations on public television and in elementary and secondary schools have served to heighten awareness of the ideas, history, and experience of African Americans in this country. But most of our African American students throughout their American educational experience had been told explicitly or implicitly that the language they spoke was inferior and that their culture was important only in February. The message, as Baldwin explains so clearly, is that the culture of African Americans is inferior. So when we tried to bring these students to voice, we reawakened years of painful experiences.

If knowledge and appreciation of the experience and culture of African Americans has been limited, there is even greater ignorance about Latinos. Latinos, like African Americans and Whites, are not one monolithic group bound together by a common language, but rather a conglomerate of different ethnicities, each with diverse histories and immigrant experiences in the United States. Operating within the knowledge base about Latinos are many stereotypes that are reenforced by the literature and the media. Among the most common is the perception of a simple duality in women's roles: women are either virgins or vamps. This stereotype is most familiar in the images of Maria and Anita in the movie *West Side Story*. The virginal type characterized by Maria represents women as pure and passive, obedient to parents and subsequently to husbands. Anita is a wild, fallen, sexpot, the desire of all men for a lover, the desire of no man for a wife. These polar opposites also exist in literature.

We introduced readings by Mohr and Cisneros to the class for two reasons. First, the syllabus prepared for this course included nothing written by Latinas, and the essay written by a Latino was about curriculum rather than about ethnic and community identification. We hoped some exposure to the works of these women would stimulate students on our campus, which is overwhelmingly female and Latin, to pursue further readings by Latinas. Second, we hoped that students would come away from discussions about these readings with a more realistic and balanced picture of identity and gender within the Latino community and, subsequently, all communities.

We used one of Mohr's short stories titled "The Artist" that dealt with an orphaned child forced to live with relatives who deny her both material and emotional support. To escape this oppressive situation, Inez marries the first suitor who proposes to her. As the story evolves, Inez, through a series of creative strategies and some deception, manages to escape her abusive husband. As the story ends, Inez is on the threshold of a new freedom with many possibilities open to her.

As with all the readings, we asked students to come prepared with questions about the story. Each study group prepared questions that focussed the discussion on the issues of gender, women's roles, cultural expectations and traditions of (in this case Puerto Rican) families. As the discussion evolved, there was an emphasis on analysis of the story from a feminist perspective. Students, who had labeled Doris a feminist, did not want to offend or contradict what they thought she would say about the experience of Inez and other Latinas. This desire not to offend the professor arose out of an incident that occurred early in the semester when a female student from a previous class returned to retrieve an umbrella. Several of the students made sexual remarks, and one made a wolf whistle. Doris immediately challenged this behavior and characterized it as sexual harassment. Doris was instantly "the radical feminist." Although we used Mohr to introduce students to the commonality and differences with other ethnic groups as well as to the cultural diversity of Latino groups, the students often made reference to what they believed was the "correct" response in light of Doris's feminist viewpoints. Paul, who often teaches literature using principles of feminist criticism, asked how strict adherence to cultural traditions also victimizes males who insist on operating from a patriarchal perspective in their relationships with women. The idea that Inez's husband was also oppressed was not what students expected from us. Although many students, both male and female, espoused views supporting the liberation and empowerment of women, they were, in reality, hindered in exploring new ideas about the potential of male–female relationships based on equality. What we were discovering, again and again, is that students came to voice when they felt safe, when they felt they knew what we thought and could give it back to us.

In a short piece from Sandra Cisneros's book, we explored further the notion of the oppression of Latinas in the United States created not only by culturally bound definitions of male–female relationships but also by the experience of speaking two languages. Esperanza, the subject of the story, associates her name in Spanish with her grandmother, a woman of great strength until she is harnessed like a workhorse in a metaphor of marriage, but Esperanza cringes when she hears her name pronounced in English. For Esperanza, identity is tied to language; her sense of self-esteem, of belief in her power as a woman, comes from Spanish. She recognizes the power structure that privileges English and struggles, therefore, with her own self-definition.

We were not sure what to expect from our class as we discussed this work. Language issues are important on our campus; there are continuing discussions about our English writing examination. Many of the students are bilingual, but many are speakers only of English. Students reacted by discussing Esperanza and her story, but we could not bring them to personal discussion of their own feelings about language or to generalizations about language policy. We wondered again about the question of voice. As with community and identity, the students seemed to want a simple definition of voice, did not want to be challenged into a complex definition incorporating multiple voices for individuals.

To engage the students further, we asked how they reacted to the teaching they were receiving in English. We tried to raise the issue of "home voice" vs. "school voice," "street English" vs. "standard written English," Spanish vs. English. We asked if they thought the language expected in the academic world was a societal means of maintaining class distinctions. The students almost universally responded that one had to know "good English" to succeed and beyond that refused to consider the issue. The conflict of identity based on race, gender, class, and language became too threatening for the students to discuss. When it came to a discussion of language policy, almost every student wanted to learn to "speak White," meaning to talk like a television anchor. And yet our students would express anger at the snobbish language of a relative who had finished higher education. For many the conflict could not be resolved.

Carlos E. Cortes, "Pluribus, Unum and the American Future"; Ronald Takaki, "An Educated and Culturally Literate Person Must Study America's Multicultural Reality"; Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Whose Culture Is It Anyway: It's not Just Anglo-Saxon"; and Donald Kagan, "Whose Culture Is It Anyway: Western Values are Central"

After all of our discussions about liberal arts, about cultural identity, about coming to voice, we wanted to end the discussion of texts with the theme of defining what a college curriculum should be in the United States as we approach the twenty-first century. By this point in our second semester of teaching together, we thought we knew each other and the problems of our classes. Still there were surprises in store for us.

We knew going into this selection of texts that our perspectives differed to some extent. Doris has for years been working to strengthen a sense of identity among her Latina students, while Paul has for years become increasingly suspicious that *multiculturalism* is often a masquerade for *my-culturalism*. Takaki and Cortes frame the argument enabling us to move toward a definition of pluralism that is different from diversity, while the point-counterpoint articles of Kagan and Gates remind us how easily minority groups are marginalized. We entered these classes hoping to solidify concepts while recognizing complexities that were incorporated into the course.

Although student statements had surprised us all semester, we were stunned when one excellent student said of cross-cultural texts, "Don't teach it to us, teach it to midwestern Whites." She was seconded by many others who indicated that they live in a multicultural society, that they accept it and like it, and that they are completely pluralistic in their attitudes. They also indicated that they believed midwestern Whites to be universally prejudiced, desperately in need of education about minority cultures, and somehow universally privileged. This was a class in which the students divided themselves in the room by ethnic group, grumbled when we placed them in diverse working groups (not because of the diversity but because they wanted to stay with their friends), argued that homosexuals were not entitled to respect for their opinions, told us that the laborers they met in bars had miserable lives because they drank, and suggested that there were no excuses for teens who got pregnant (this while one of the unmarried teenage students in the class was entering her eighth month). Could they see a contradiction? For many of the class, the answer was "no."

When we tried to bring the contradictions into the open, we were again greeted with silence and resistance. A group of students simply dropped out of the discussion. One male student spent the hour massaging the shoulders of a female student. A second male, who had been vying for her attentions all semester, turned away and picked at his sneakers. Some students whispered and giggled; another read a magazine. Paul ignored them. Doris tried for the first part of the class to engage them and then focused on their outrageous behavior. She was disgusted with the students and wondered if we had been wasting our time.

By pushing and prodding, however, we coaxed another group of students, significant in number, to discuss the issues and to reveal a solid understanding of the material in the course. They told us, sometimes subtly and sometimes directly, that they were afraid that college would change them. It was, for them, uncomfortable to touch on these very significant issues. And yet they still wanted to read writers like Baldwin and Cliff, Cisneros and Mohr, writers who knew people like them, and to read writers like Newman, writers who made them feel like academics. They told us that after working with this material collaboratively, they believed they were ready for the challenges facing them in college.

Implications for Pedagogical Practice

The complexities that we faced in the classroom are mirror images of the complexities of society at large. The multitude of racial and ethnic groups in this country can be a tapestry of rich cultural experiences to be shared and enjoyed by others, or it can fray at the edges and explode as it did in Los Angeles. As racial incidents in the country seem to increase annually, we see even more clearly than when we began that these issues are central to higher education. Although these issues are not easy and are challenging to students, the first year of college is an appropriate time for discussion, risk-taking, and growth.

As teachers we, too, have discussed, taken risks and grown. After two semesters of teaching together and analyzing our experiences, we have come to recognize the parallels between our original expectations and fears and the experiences of students. As experienced teachers in a multicultural setting, we both thought we knew how our students would respond. Like our students, we thought we knew what this college classroom would be. Although we had concerns about each other, we knew that we were both committed to the concept of pluralism. Like our students, we knew we would be working with people of different ethnic backgrounds and expected things to go reasonably smoothly anyway. And yet, we had to develop as a team. Our suspicions of each other dissolved as we struggled with issues of gender, ethnicity, authority, and privilege and how to present them to our students. We do not always agree or see issues in the same way, but we respect our differences and believe in each other's good will and commitment to similar goals.

Working as a team required that we trust each other especially during times when we did not know where or how the class was going, how the students were reacting, or what the other was doing. In one class discussion about cultural behaviors and how physical distance between individuals is seen differently between cultures as symbolic of power relationships, Paul began to move physically closer to Doris until they were nearly touching to demonstrate, ironically, how Latinos are more comfortable at close distance than most Whites. Because he is a White male, Doris did not expect him to move so close, and though holding her ground, was visibly uncomfortable. Doris had no idea what Paul intended but trusted him and did not back away. At first the students giggled, but then understood the point being illustrated. Discussions about physical distance often end up explaining why Whites may feel uncomfortable around nonwhites. But because we were an ethnically mixed team, we were also able to point out why many nonwhites interpret the backing away of Whites as judgmental or hostile.

Working together as a team also helped us come to grips with issues of privilege, authority, and legitimacy. Because we were a team, Doris could point out that students reacted to Paul as the expert or authority on everything. Before this experience, Paul never questioned his authority in the classroom. After seeing it in this perspective, he began to understand in a much more palpable way what is meant when feminists and Marxists talk about privilege. As a White male, Paul did not have to establish his role in the classroom, but gaining the confidence of the students in her academic role was a serious issue for Doris as a woman of color. Because we were a team, Paul could ask Doris in front of the class genuine questions revealing his own lack of knowledge about some gender and ethnic issues. Raising these questions lent legitimacy to the issues and helped to establish Doris's areas of expertise and authority. As the semester progressed, students began to ask questions of us equally. We recognize after having dealt with this for two semesters that this issue will resurface constantly as teachers of color face their classes and if White males do not begin to work with others.

Similarly, Paul worried about his legitimacy as a teacher and mentor to students of color. When students first made individual appointments with us, they chose to see us by gender or ethnicity. By demonstrating her trust in Paul in the class, Doris enabled students of color to take a risk in trusting this White male.

Because we were a team, Doris did not walk out when the students acted out; because she assumed the responsibility to keep them under at least some control, Paul could ignore the recalcitrant group. Doris's efforts kept the acting-out behaviors, for the most part, quiet, and, at least for Paul, ignorable. By this point in the semester we were used to each other's teaching styles and classroom approaches. We frequently discussed and analyzed what had taken place in the classroom. Doris's awareness of the relationship of socioeconomic problems to academic success made her, perhaps, overly concerned with the success of every last student in the room. Paul's experience analyzing the yearly academic drop list made him, perhaps, too willing to allow students unwilling to invest energy in the class to fall to the side. Although we both consider ourselves and each other committed to enabling our students to succeed, our professional backgrounds, experiences in different parts of the college, and genders led to significantly different pedagogical approaches that we found meshed well in our team approach. Sometimes we disagreed completely on how to approach behavioral problems, but we allowed each other to go about classroom business in our own ways without presenting our students with a conflict. In retrospect, these behaviors spoke most forcibly to us about the discomfort we were imposing on the students by teaching cross-cultural texts in a multicultural classroom. And, perhaps, such discomfort is an essential part of student growth. As we learned through this experience, what we are doing is threatening the complacency these students have about their own multicultural identity, an identity that they claim for themselves but do not really understand. We were also jeopardizing our own complacency about ourselves as teachers and about our students and their lives. Although we now know to expect acting-out behavior in such a classroom, we do not yet have solutions for always controlling it. In fact, we have learned to work through different approaches to behavioral acts, recognizing how our backgrounds, experience, and gender affect our own approaches.

What we have learned most forcefully in this course is that pluralism is complicated and rewarding; diversity is easy and isolating. Pluralism requires that people step outside themselves to see from a different perspective. This cannot take place in isolation. Although many of us are committed to multicultural education, we understand and teach it only from our own perspective and from the texts. Bringing diverse students and faculty together to work collaboratively on these issues enables us to learn to trust, to take risks, and to grow. Multiethnic, cross-gender teams, we believe, are an integral part of this process. If we are to teach cross-cultural texts effectively, then we must create cross-cultural faculty teams; we must relate the material to the ethnic histories of all of our students; and we must validate the pluralism of multiple communities in each person. In this way we open the college community to all students, and give real meaning to such terms as *access* and *inclusive education*.

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8 "Please, Correct Me if I Am Wrong": Teaching Civil Rights and Race Relations in the Age of the Politically Correct

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Any anthology addressing the possibility of a "new canon" tacitly addresses the debates surrounding the concept of the "politically correct." The contestation about what does or does not belong in the literary canon and, subsequently, in the English classroom has evolved into a quagmire of tangled arguments both inside and perhaps, most significantly, outside of the academy.[1] While I cannot devote too much time to unraveling all of the threads of these debates, I would like to address how the concept of the "politically correct" is a presence in the classroom and the ways in which it both hinders and transforms the learning experience for undergraduates. In my course, "'What's Going On?': The Civil Rights Movement and the Culture Industry—Exploring Questions of History, Art, and Social Protest," issues of race, gender, civil unrest, class conflict, and social protest arise weekly and, therefore, present a unique example of how to manage and facilitate student discussion with politically charged subject matter. The course is highly interdisciplinary. Students read drama, fiction, and poetry, but also listen to music, view films, and read historical narratives. The course format implicitly questions not only the canon, but disciplinary boundaries as well.

In this essay, I will discuss how, why, and for whom the course was designed. Then, I will describe how notions of a "politically correct" response to discussion topics influenced the learning experience. It is important to keep in mind that, among my students, the concept of what it meant to be "politically correct" was always highly contested and carried both positive and negative connotations depending on the circumstance. In order to illustrate these nuances, I will describe some specific scenarios and then suggest ideas for facilitating discussions that allow students to express opinions in an open environment.

Course Design

Theoretically, several questions undergird the design of this course on the civil rights movement and the culture industry. In the broadest sense, the course examines the relationship of cultural products such as film, music, and literature to historical knowing. In other words, throughout the semester, students are challenged to consider the multiple ways in which they come to know history. Within this framework, several other issues emerge. For instance, the course asks students to explore the relationship of art (from a Gwendolyn Brooks poem to a James Brown song) to social protest. It asks them to consider the ways in which artistic creations act as political tools, and the role of the artist in political struggle. In his essay, "The World and the Jug," Ralph Ellison writes the following about *Invisible Man:*

> My goal was not to escape, or hold back, but to work through; to transcend the painful conditions with which they deal. The protest is there, not because I was helpless before my racial condition, but because I put it there. If there is anything 'miraculous' about the book it is the result of hard work undertaken in the belief that the work of art is important in itself, that it is a social action in itself. (137)

The course examines how this type of personal philosophy sustained artists confronting the consequences of civil rights battles. When addressing the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., I have students read poetry written as memorials to their lives. The Medgar Evers murder and the Birmingham bombings are viewed in relation to James Baldwin's play, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, which was dedicated to Evers and the children killed in Alabama.

Music also plays a major role in this component of the course. One week is spent listening to Bernice Johnson Reagon's collection of Freedom Songs in conjunction with her writings on their significance to the Civil Rights Movement. Later in the semester, students listen to Motown, Aretha Franklin, and James Brown selections considered in the context of the urban uprisings in the North. Finally, students explore the relationship of avant-garde jazz, specifically John Coltrane's work, to Black Nationalism.

The study of film's relationship to history has two major threads: (1) analyzing the ways in which film reconstructs historical events, and (2) understanding how film, particularly the Hollywood feature, contributes to collective memory in a culture. Each week, students view a feature film and one episode of the *Eyes on the Prize* series relevant to the historical topics assigned. The films are both those produced during the Civil Rights era such as, *The Defiant Ones* (1958) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962); and those produced in recent years which attempt to reconstruct events from the Movement such as, *Mississippi Burning* (1988) and *The Long Walk Home* (1990). This emphasis on film is based on the premise that many of my students, who grew up during the Reagan Eighties, have come to know the Civil Rights Movement primarily through visual media (news footage and films). Foregrounding film in the classroom allows students to develop critical perspectives on how visual images and narratives shape their knowledge of the past.

Overall, the interdisciplinary nature of the course and my decision to focus on primary rather than secondary sources helps students situate themselves in the historical moment being studied. Often in courses of this nature, students have a tendency to view subjects such as the Civil Rights Movement from a presentist perspective. They attempt to apply contemporary debates about race relations onto subject matter that warrants a more historical approach. I have found that using a variety of texts such as poems, music, and film, that were produced during the time period being studied encourage students to consider course material historically. There are still hurdles to overcome, however. For instance, during the week students listened to James Brown and Aretha Franklin, I asked them to try to forget all of the versions of songs such as "I Feel Good" that have been inserted into today's commercial advertisements and imagine how the music would have sounded when it was initially released. I am not sure that they were actually able to accomplish this, but I felt it was important to try. It has been my experience that students are much more enthusiastic about the learning experience when they are asked to examine and interrelate nontraditional texts and are, therefore, much more willing to put in the extra time a course of this nature often requires.

The Students

When offered as a seminar at Yale during the fall of 1992, the course was open to all majors and attracted students in fields from engineering to ethnic studies. In the 1993 spring semester, I taught the course through the English Department at Wesleyan University although some students were not English majors. In general, the course attracted students who were intrigued by the multimedia, interdisciplinary approach. Both Yale and Wesleyan students tend to be highly motivated, intellectually precocious, and committed to a diverse range of extracurricular activities. Moreover, a majority of the students in both semesters were politically active in their own lives and were drawn to the subject matter for personal reasons. For instance, I taught students who were protesting the war in Bosnia; organizing plays for, by, and about women of color; participating in AIDS awareness rallies; marching for gay and lesbian rights in Washington, D.C.; and working for labor unions. For this reason, classroom dynamics were strongly influenced by not only the political nature of the subject matter, but also the ways in which students identified (or, in some cases, did not identify) themselves as political activists.

Finally, at both Yale and Wesleyan, the students in my class were racially and ethnically diverse. The class attracted African Americans, Indian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Whites, and one Japanese exchange student. Moreover, students of mixed racial and ethnic heritage encouraged other students to question the notions of "race" and "ethnicity" in general. In both semesters, there was also a fairly equal ratio of women to men. This diversity shaped how students reacted to course material and to each other. In most cases, the racial, ethnic, and gender mix of the student body prevented anyone from feeling too marginalized in discussion. Nor did any one person become a token representative of a particular group.

Classroom Dynamics

Given the strong personalities of the students and the highly charged subject matter of civil rights and race relations, my classroom became a unique setting for studying the dynamics of political discourse among undergraduates. In recent debates, the notion of a "politically correct" stance has become practically synonymous with censorship and intellectually narrow approaches to scholarship.[2] For undergraduates, it is a concept that can have both negative and positive connotations. For some students with whom I have spoken, "politically correct" is a label to be placed on someone who espouses certain leftist, political views for the sake of fashion rather than belief. For others, it is a philosophy of sorts that dictates how they interact with the world, a world they perceive to be hostile to their marginalized, radical views. And there is also a range of other interpretations between these two extremes. These conflicting and shifting definitions of "political correctness" influence discussion in overt and covert ways. The most obvious repercussions are the ways in which students do monitor and subtly censor one another when sensitive topics are brought into a discussion. Less obvious, but equally important and fascinating, are the ways in which students begin to project their own anxieties about their political motivations onto texts introduced in class.

The most revealing illustration of this phenomenon occurred during the week I taught the film, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), which, of course, is based on the Harper Lee novel of the same name. The sit-ins and freedom rides were the historical subject matter of the week. Students saw the *Eyes on the Prize* episode, "Ain't Scared of Your Jails, 1960–61," which presents this narrative. In conjunction with these films, they read the first four chapters of Clayborne Carson's, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, and James Peck's personal essay, "Freedom Ride: Washington to New Orleans," which gives the perspective of a white civil-rights activist's experiences in the South. The documentary, Carson's book, and the essay raise questions about the role of whites in the African American struggle. Also related to this theme, I assigned the chapter, "Three Ghost Stories," from Lillian Smith's work, *Killers of the Dream*, originally published in 1949, and then revised in 1961. This work provokes thought on Smith's position as a white woman working for the Movement; and on the sexual mythologies of the South which surface in the film, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, as Atticus Finch defends a black man accused of raping a white woman. All of the materials for this week addressed the complexities of interracial activism during this early phase of the Movement.

When I taught this class at Yale, several issues emerged during discussion that revealed the tensions and ambivalence many students feel about what it means to be politically active in today's society. The first half of the class was devoted to discussing Carson, the Peck essay, and the stark footage of the *Eyes On the Prize* episode which is punctuated by grim images of beaten freedom riders. The second half of class shifted to a dialogue about Smith's writings in *Killers of the Dream* and the film, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. While I was expecting students to take up Smith's ideas on the "Three Ghost Stories" of the South and relate them to the film, this was not the question that most interested them. On the contrary, the issue that most concerned the students was Atticus Finch's motives for defending the black man. Students engaged in a rather heated debate about whether Finch was acting from a sincere personal desire to fight a racially unjust situation, or if he merely was fulfilling his duty as a lawyer with no real investment in transforming his community.

As these arguments progressed, I began to wonder what was generating all of this energy about what seemed a rather minor issue in terms of the themes of the film. Then one student interjected that her classmates' debate was really about what it means to be labeled "politically correct." In other words, all of the concern about Atticus Finch's motives or intentions mimicked similar discussions she had had outside the classroom about what it meant to be "politically correct." This student recalled how one of her friends from Mexico had been visiting the United States and was recycling newspapers one day, when someone asked her if she was recycling because she was trying to be "politically correct." This friend did not understand the question and said, "No, I just think I should recycle the papers." This anecdote opened up a discussion among the other students about how they were all concerned about how their own actions were interpreted by others whenever they took a political stand. In this case, the label, "politically correct," means someone who is a charlatan, falsely professing beliefs only for the sake of appearances.

In general, many of the students voiced anxieties and frustration about how these negative connotations of the "politically correct" label had influenced their lives. As stated earlier, many of my students were political activists in their own right and, if not activists, they were concerned about how their daily actions, like recycling newspapers, were interpreted by others. Their comments revealed a palpable sense of frustration that there seemed to be no space for them to act out their political beliefs without running the risk of being labeled "politically correct" and, therefore, an imposter.

The Atticus Finch Dilemma

Sincere desire to act in accordance with one's beliefs involved what I would like to call the "Atticus Finch dilemma." This dilemma entails choosing between taking a political stand and the risk of being seen as a dissembler (which is how the students interpreted Finch's actions in the film) or not acting on one's beliefs at all. While this discussion diverged from the original lesson plan, it was one of the most meaningful for the students. Through their identification with Finch's situation, they were able to make personal connections to their own lives and speak quite openly about the conflicts they face ("When someone tells a racist joke, should I tell them it's wrong?") and the choices they make on a daily basis.

Sensitive Issues

While there were times when students used course materials as a springboard to talk about their own frustrations with "political correctness," there were also situations in which these same issues influenced how students participated in class discussion. In other words, moments arose when students attempted to demarcate the boundaries of what were and were not permissible topics of discussion. These boundaries were defined by one's sensitivity and openmindedness to politically controversial subject matter. In this case, though not directly labeled as such, "politically correct" responses were valued and, at Wesleyan in particular, a subtle competition developed among students about who could come up with the most tolerant reaction to a controversial question. In order to illustrate this point, I would like to describe a week when we addressed sensitive issues such as homoeroticism, interracial friendship, and women's liberation. The historical framework of the class was the desegregation battles of Little Rock and James Meredith's enrollment to the University of Mississippi. For background information, the students saw the *Eyes On the Prize* episode, "Fighting Back, 1957–1962," and read excerpts from Daisy Bates's memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, as well as a chapter from Robert Weisbrot's book, *Freedom Bound*. The feature film for this class was *The Defiant Ones* (1958). This film, about a white man and a black man chained together who gradually develop a strong friendship, premiered in the midst of the desegregation struggles in which people lost their lives over the mere prospect of whites and blacks sharing the same classroom. The startling contrast found in the juxtaposition of these two contemporaneous narratives provides an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship of film to a specific historical moment.

In *The Defiant Ones*, the friendship that develops between Tony Curtis's and Sidney Poitier's characters raises questions about interracial male bonding and sexuality. Poitier and Curtis play escaped convicts who are forced to overcome their mutual dislike for one another in order to succeed in their flight from justice. Initially a burden, the physical chain that connects them forces them to befriend one another in spite of racial barriers. This friendship takes on tender, physical dimensions as the men rescue one another from perils, nurture each other through injury, and cradle one another in sleep. The homoerotic subtext of the narrative did not go unnoticed by movie reviewers at the time of the film's release. In her typically caustic style, reviewer Pauline Kael (qtd. in Bogle, 73) referred to *The Defiant Ones* as, "*The Thirty-Nine Steps* in drag."

. The homoeroticism in the film is accentuated when a love triangle develops among the two men and a woman they encounter on a farm. The woman owns the chisel that allows them to break the chain that binds them. With their physical tie severed, the men are free to go their separate ways. The farm woman, a poor single mother, deserted by her husband, encourages this separation as she seduces Curtis's character in the hope that he will rescue her from her bleak life. He does agree to run away with her, but he expresses concern about Poitier's character, "Colored." The woman tells Poitier to escape through a nearby swamp to appease Curtis's concerns about his friend's freedom. When Curtis finds out that the woman purposely sent Poitier into a fatal trap since "no one has come out of the swamp alive," he beats and abandons the woman to rescue Poitier. When the two men reunite, they attempt to jump on a train which Poitier reaches but Curtis does not. Rather than abandon his white companion, Poitier sacrifices his own freedom to be with Curtis. In the final sequence, the two men cradle in each other's arms as the sheriff arrives to take them back into custody.

Clearly, this narrative raises many provocative issues not only about race, but also gender, sexuality, and class. In the discussion at Wesleyan, I brought up the issue of homoeroticism for several reasons. First, I wanted students to consider how the issue would have appeared to audiences in 1958, a time of fierce homophobia. In conjunction with this theme, I prompted students to recognize that the issue was not hidden, but discussed at the time as evidenced by the film reviews. Most important, I wanted students to think about the various ways notions of sexuality influence racisms in a society. The Lillian Smith readings relate to this point as well. When I opened up the discussion, students started to address some of the ideas I set up. After five to ten minutes of conversation, one woman interrupted and said, "I don't understand why we *have* to talk about the homoeroticism in the film. Why can't we all just accept the image of two men nurturing one another as normal?" Implicit in her comments was the assumption that everyone in the class openly accepted differences in sexual orientation and that, because of this fact, no more needed to be said.

I responded that while it would be a better world if homosexual relationships were perceived as "normal" as heterosexual ones, that in the United States, this is not the case. I reminded the student that, historically and currently, positive images of homosexual and homosocial relationships, particularly between men, were rarely seen in cultural productions. And that, for this reason, examining the manifestation of the male friendship in *The Defiant Ones* in 1958 was a valid and important object of inquiry. In this incident, I realized that a student's desire to present a "politically correct" response (i.e., "Let's all accept homosexuality and there is no need to discuss it.") could truncate important avenues of discussion by making other students, who may have other opinions, feel that there was no room for their views. Furthermore, the point of raising the topic was to get students to think about how "differences"—whether of class, gender, race or sexuality—are constructed in a culture. Rather than pretend these differences don't exist, I chose to foreground how this process develops and what the ramifications of it are. In this situation, reminding students of the historical and cultural realities of homophobia in the United States reopened the possibility of further discussion.

Within this same conversation about *The Defiant Ones*, a similar problem arose. One woman in the class was upset about the representation of the female character as weak and dependent on a man for her happiness. This student insisted that she should have been stronger and more able to take care of herself and that it irritated her that the character wasn't portrayed in that way. I tried to get the student to historicize the portrayal, to think about what possibilities a poor, single mother might have had in the late fifties and how the character might have been seen by audiences at the time. While other students in the class understood the point, this particular woman insisted that historical circumstances did not matter and the screenwriters should have known to create a more independent female. This type of presentism did not arise too often throughout the semester. In this particular incident, I realized that it was more important for this student to assert an argument about the possibilities of female independence than to acknowledge the historical moment of the film. I did remind students that it is more important to analyze why a text is the way it is, rather than debate how it could or should have been more "politically correct."

As these examples illustrate, there was a great deal of what I would like to call "political posturing" among students. Students would try to outdo one another by coming up with the most "correct" reaction to a question. Or one student would try to define the acceptable range of responses to a certain point. Over time, I developed techniques to disrupt this process and allow for the possibility of a more open and rich discussion. One of the most successful exercises was to divide the class in half and have each group debate one side of an argument. For instance, when teaching the film, *Mississippi*

Burning, which grossly distorts the narrative of the 1964 Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney murders by portraying the FBI as the heroes, I had one group of students defend the film and one group critique it. This was, by far, one of the most invigorating discussions of the semester. Students seemed to enjoy being asked to construct an argument that they might not have espoused themselves, and the group effort encouraged shyer students to participate. The format of the discussion generated some of the most creative responses to the film that I have heard.

Response Statements

Another technique I have always used in my teaching is the one-page, weekly, response statement. Before each class, students submit a one-page reaction to the week's assignments. These are highly informal and many students refer to them as their "journal" about the class. The statements allow me to get an idea of what issues are on students' minds before they enter the classroom. For the students, it provided a forum to express ideas that they may not have felt comfortable raising in class. For instance, I had one lesbian student who wrote to me about her feelings about participating in the Gay and Lesbian Rights March on Washington. Very honestly, she described how she saw people wearing t-shirts that proclaimed, "I am straight, but not narrow," and how this irritated her. She explained that most days of her life she felt invisible, that everyone assumed she was straight when she wasn't, and on the one day when straight people could have been invisible, they had to announce their sexuality. She related these thoughts to the separatism of the Black Power era, when whites were excluded from many Black Nationalist groups. After the march, she said she had come to understand why sometimes people desire separatism from an emotional perspective even though it might not be the best alternative in the long run.

In another response, an African American student was able to discuss what it meant to her to read and learn about James Baldwin. Apparently, all of her life, her parents had scorned James Baldwin and his work and had told her to avoid it. Her parents saw Baldwin as an expatriate who was not loyal to the cause of African Americans. Furthermore, when she called her mother during the week we read *Blues for Mister Charlie*, her mother told her, "Don't trust any white person trying to teach you James Baldwin." After this student read the play and saw *The Price of the Ticket*, a documentary on his life, she wrote to me about how much she appreciated the fact that I had introduced her to him. I was pleased that this student was able to write about this to me and discuss her feelings about being taught African American history by a white instructor. This is not the type of issue that would come up in the public forum of classroom discussion, but I think it meant a great deal to students when confronting such personal issues, to have an avenue to express their feelings. This is why I would strongly encourage the use of some form of a written, "journal," response in a class of this nature. When addressing sensitive issues such as race relations, gender politics, or sexual orientation, students often need means to express reactions that they may not want to share with the group.

Conclusion

To conclude, I think it is important to consider how this type of course might be taught at other institutions and with different student bodies. As noted earlier, this course was offered as an elective seminar primarily for juniors and seniors. The few sophomores who were admitted had a more difficult time integrating course materials and taking on broader philosophical questions about the nature of "history." The elective nature of the course, however, ensured that students who enrolled had a vested interest in its success; they usually came to class prepared and ready to participate. If this course were offered as a general education requirement, an instructor might want to survey students early in the semester to have a better idea of what students' interests were (i.e., music or literature) and then design a syllabus that addresses these interests. Also, the students at Yale and Wesleyan came from diverse backgrounds. Other universities and colleges might present a more homogeneous group of students. In these cases, dividing the class into groups for debates would become even more critical. Role-playing would get students to argue from positions that might not be their own to generate a more lively discussion around the issues at hand. I would add that every community has civil rights issues and race relations problems that any instructor can draw on to make the course issues more immediate to students' lives.

There are many challenges to teaching a course that presents politically charged topics to students whose identities often are shaped or being developed in relation to the subject matter. The added dimension of an awareness among students that there is a "politically correct" response to certain ideas or lines of argument can sometimes hinder debate, but not in all cases. Sometimes a student's allegiance to a "politically correct" response can provoke others to present alternative views. As public debates about the "politically correct" continue, many scholars have shied away from teaching controversial subject matter. Students long to discuss issues that are politically relevant to their personal and public lives. With a sensitivity to the complexities involved, instructors can learn to provide students with a forum where these issues can be addressed openly and productively.

Notes

1. For a recent example of mainstream, conservative, commentary on "politically correct" behavior in the classroom, see George F. Will's column, "'Compassion' on Campus," *Newsweek*, May 31, 1993.

2. Ibid.

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III Methods, Assessment, and Difference

9 Teaching Cross-Cultural Encounters and Student Writing with Question-Hypothesis-Questions (QHQs)

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The canon wars seem to have peaked. They have, however, left important questions of pedagogy to take their place, not to mention related questions of criticism and politics. Is there more at stake than equal or fair representation within the canon? Could these new works have something to say not just in their own right, as indifferent alternatives to the others, but something to say *to* those others, and to us? Might these works offer each other and offer us what Bakhtin describes as "the eyes of *another* culture" required for any culture to reveal itself "fully and profoundly" (7)? Is it possible that these new additions to the canon might not only enlarge but also change the shape and character of United States literature? Does this new U.S. literature suggest new ways of teaching both the reading of literature and student writing?

One common rationale for paying attention to student writing in a literature course is based on an intradepartmental version of arguments for "writing across the curriculum": writing helps students learn course material and helps them learn in better ways—helps them learn not just to remember but also to confirm, connect, reformulate, translate, and extend. These claims are modest enough (too modest, I will argue), but they meet powerful resistance both outside and within the English department insofar as they not only promise to better serve existing course goals but also begin to challenge powerful assumptions about the scientific or aesthetic autonomy of the knowledge at the center of those courses, knowledge often thought to be independent of any relationships it might have with other bodies of knowledge or with students and the changing contexts among which knowledges and students live. Literature courses in English departments do usually pay more attention to student writing than other courses do, yet even literature courses often give scant attention to student writing except as an instrument of evaluation, or as a way of focusing student attention on the literary artifact, or the literary-critical artifact considered to be the central material of the course. As Susan Miller argues, literary studies, at least since the New Criticism, has established itself as an academic discipline on the basis of these same assumptions. Composition studies, since Mina Shaughnessy's New Critical attention to student writing and the rise of process theories of composition, has more recently made similar moves:

> [I]n calling composition a discipline, its professionals also appropriated the same scientific spirit that led New Critics to claim that literary language is separate from ordinary language or from what Wellek and Warren designated as "rhetorical literature." (116)

Miller argues for a different agenda for composition studies and for a different relationship between it and literary studies. She recommends more attention to this "ordinary language" of writing "in specific and complexly loaded situations" (114), including the situation of composition studies as a field in its complex and changing institutional and political contexts. Miller's recommendations about composition as a field within English studies may be usefully adapted to the place of student writing in literature courses. The kinds of changes she recommends for our conception of student writing can also improve the teaching of our "new canon" of literature and can help us learn better ways of teaching both reading and writing in literature courses.

Miller's argument is part of a more general trend in the "collective thinking" of composition studies, summarized by Donald McQuade as "from product to process to the social and material conditions and contexts for composition" (510). McQuade notes that the field of composition studies has tended to address these issues in terms of changes in pedagogy, while literary studies has been preoccupied instead with curricular change (as in the canon wars). This remains true even when the emphasis on conditions, contexts, and purposes of writing would seem a common ground for both. The teaching of both composition and literature might be improved, then, by focusing students' and teachers' attention on the specific and changing situations, purposes, and interactions of both these kinds of writing.

A Strategy

I'd like to describe one teaching strategy I've been experimenting with as a way of moving in this direction.[1] First, I'll explain briefly and give an example of what I do and what effects I've seen, then I'll try to situate these specific effects again in relation to recent trends in the study of literature, composition, and pedagogy, trends that may explain and support what I'm doing in more general terms. This more theoretical explanation may be especially necessary since these approaches to composition and literature do challenge certain prevalent assumptions about literature, composition, and pedagogy. Gary Lindberg, for example, writes that the subject of study in his literature classroom, unlike most, "is not some ideal interpretation but the [student] writer's own process of making meaning" (122).[2] I would want to add questions about how this individualized process of meaning-making becomes part of a more collaborative and perhaps conflictual project in the literature classroom (questions Lindberg's and others' preference for private reading journals may somewhat obscure). As Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee point out, in the context of pedagogy, all such write-to-learn activities "bring with them a fundamental shift in the nature of teaching and learning. Rather than augmenting traditional approaches to instruction, in a very real sense such approaches undermine them—or are undermined in turn by the goals and procedures of more traditionally oriented approaches to teaching" (70). Writing to learn may lead to covering less course material, and perhaps to actively questioning and resisting course material, though it may also promote deeper and different kinds of reasoning about that same material. But I will return to these issues after describing what we do from day to day.

On any given class day, about one-fourth of my students are required to come with 250- to 500-word, usually handwritten, exploratory essays that we call question-hypothesis-questions (or QHQs). They will have written these about the reading to be discussed that day. The next fourth of the alphabet will bring QHQs the next class day, and so forth. A QHQ begins with a question the student has about the reading, sometimes stated in one sentence, sometimes with a few more sentences of explanation, then moves into a longer hypothesis in answer to that question (this makes up the body of the essay), and then it ends with a follow-up question calling for more exploration in discussion and further reading and writing: question-hypothesis-question.

The first question is a focused, genuine question they have about the reading, not a rhetorical question or a review-type question about what they already know, but also not so difficult or not so phrased that they can't possibly make any progress writing and thinking about it.[3] They soon understand this, because what happens in the hypothesis part of the essay is that they do think through their question by writing about it, often by following several steps in thinking through their question, often by trying two or three alternative hypotheses in turn, and often by combining these and other methods. I suggest that they may find in writing their QHQs that writing, like long division in arithmetic, allows us to work out questions and problems much more complex than the ones we can do in our heads, since writing allows us to work on a problem part by part, and allows us to test educated hypotheses about the problem.[4] I suggest, too, that writing about such questions and problems in an essay they know they will read aloud and discuss with the class, encourages an awareness of how their reading relates to those of other students in the class, readings sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting. Their follow-up question either calls attention to a part of their original question that remains unresolved, or it asks another question raised somehow by their hypothesis, often a more focused and more ambitious question than their opening question. I explain that I will grade these QHQs not on how well they recite important details or summarize their reading, nor on whether or not they answer their questions, but on how well they think aloud through their writing, how well they reformulate and extend in the context of the class what they observed or already know in response to their own questions. (I am looking not only for personal engagement but also for the kind of public, conceptual development of that engagement that is not always achieved in journal writing, even dialogic journals. See MacDonald and Cooper 1992).

Class discussions are structured by the QHQs students bring that day. First, I ask for second thoughts on the previous class (sometimes offering my own), then I ask for brief summary phrases about the QHQs for that day. I list these with students' names in one corner of the board, so that we can group or order questions and decide where to start. Often we stop and write briefly or talk in small groups briefly about the topics people have chosen. (Small groups seem especially important near the beginning of the term.)

One student then reads her QHQ slowly and clearly to the class. As we listen, I try to map out on the blackboard relationships among key words and phrases from the student's QHQ, or the student may volunteer to draw her own map. (This tends to increase as the term goes on.) If I have drawn the map, I check it with the student writer and the class. Then we all discuss the question, which other students often say they also wondered about; discuss the hypothesis or hypotheses offered by the student writer, adding to our map on the board as we go; and discuss follow-up questions, both hers and others suggested by our discussion. I then move to another part of the board for a related QHQ, and we listen to, map out, and discuss that QHQ, each time making as many connections, translations, and comparisons as possible between this QHQ and the ones already on the board. If an interesting new question arises in discussion that someone doesn't have a QHQ written about, we may stop to write a short QHQ on that question, or we may do a QHQ orally together as a class, again writing key words and phrases on the board. Class discussions function as a sketchy way of writing collaboratively or interactively as a class. And occasionally I bring a QHQ myself, or I may give scheduled lectures (structured like QHQs), trying to focus not only on the literature but also on student QHQs and class discussions as other "primary forms of cultural production" (McQuade 1992, 515). These QHQs, discussions, and lectures may lead toward other QHQs, discussions, lectures, longer essays, or exams. In any case it is clear to students that all such QHQs or lectures are works in progress. They are personal observations and reflections, and they are also more or less visible negotiations with particular contexts. At different times, these contexts seem determined by the reading, by class discussions, by the discipline, by the university as an institution, and by the changing American cultures of which the student writing, the reading, and the class writing and discussion are all different parts. All are involved in the act of making meaning from the ongoing dialectic between cognition or expression and its multiple, changing contexts.

Perhaps the most obvious advantage of this teaching strategy, from a writing-across-the-curriculum standpoint, is that it keeps a focus on student writing at the same time that we're discussing literary writing. But I'm especially interested in the *kind* of attention it focuses both on student writing and on literary writing. In terms of their own writing, choosing and articulating the first question of the QHQ helps to assure that students have some ownership of their writing and thus write with a surer sense of purpose than when they are answering someone else's question or reviewing or summarizing what someone else has written. They are also, however, setting the agenda for class discussion, so they write with a sense of their particular audience and situation that is keener and usually more accurate than when they write only for a teacher or themselves. Susan Miller says,

> Given responsibility to account for the place their writing will take among others in specific situations—its particularity and the responses it is designed to elicit—students could become aware of the window on full participation in discourse communities that their writing represents. (199)

As a question about what they do not already know, this practice also helps assure that their writing is not only "appropriate" but also a challenge to the particular student, taking place "not so much at the ripe, but at the ripening functions" (Lev Vygotsky, quoted by Langer and Applebee 1987, 142), at the frontier between the student's own knowledge and experience and the new context represented by the reading and by the classroom audience.[5] This means class discussions tend to be both more diverse and more sophisticated than usual because these discussions start not from the loudest or most glib or most socially privileged remarks, but from focused written questions, a practice which often gives quieter students a reassuringly prepared foothold in class discussions. Their writing and thinking becomes unusually important, and these students do pay attention to each other's writing and thinking, because this QHQ starts the discussion and sets the terms in which it will proceed. I reinforce this idea by having them nominate exam questions (comparative essay questions) adapted from questions and terms discussed in class. In these exam essays and other essays, I ask them to address as much as possible readings and discussions other than their own, which may or may not include external research. And in the mapping of our discussions on the board, I emphasize repeatedly how different individuals' writing and thinking can benefit and develop through democratic interaction and discussion, in ways that our schools tend to underestimate.[6]

Both the structure of QHQs and the class mapping and discussions reinforce the idea that writing is a dialectical, dynamic, and contextualized process, not just a process of recording and organizing others' or even students' own already formed thoughts, but a way to think through a person's or a group's questions and difficulties—a way to record thoughts, but also to communicate and thus to reflect upon those thoughts, and to rearticulate and extend them in the context of second thoughts and other people's thoughts. Even the individual student's graded written *product* here is expected to stress a visible, ongoing, *situated process* of writing and thinking by starting with one context of assumptions for the opening question, then usually renegotiating the writer's relationship to that context and the class context once the hypothesis is formed and explained, in order then to pose the follow-up question that suggests openings for more thinking, writing, and discussion.[7] Then class discussions give students valuable practice translating and negotiating among the different terms they choose and use, building toward communal (and dissenting, negotiating) acts of expression, interpretation, and persuasion, and a knowledge of how such textual activities are produced. That is, the class builds not toward a correct or ideal interpretation that only the teacher owns and that the students can only discover or imitate, but toward conscious comparisons and negotiations among the different interpretations that we produce and develop in our discussions.

Readers' Questions/Writers' Questions

Besides these considerations with regard to students' own writing and thinking, I want to suggest that this strategy also makes for valuable connections between the writing these students are doing and the writing they're reading in U.S. literature. For one thing, the terms and categories they use in their own writing tend to be drawn either from the literature we're reading at the time or from the American culture in which they live, a culture in which that literature and their own writing are both now taking their different parts. Having explored a question about one section of a novel, for example, students notice in reading and discussing the rest of the novel that it continues to pursue that question much as the student or the class as a whole often does. And when students borrow terms and categories from the literature, they often encounter both seductions and difficulties that can be quite similar to the seductions and difficulties with those same terms and categories that Mark Twain, T. S. Eliot, Ralph Ellison, or Toni Morrison also experienced and explored in *their* writing. That is, students notice that both the question and the terms in which a student has asked it are often much the same question these other writers asked in much the same terms in their poetry, novels, plays, or essays—or else they are the contemporary, local descendants of these older questions.

In any case, these student questions are what those other writers' questions mean to these students here and now. It becomes clear, then, that to discuss these student questions *is* to discuss these other more famous writers' questions. Reading on in these other more famous writers' works is to read for possible answers to, or more often, for development of, student questions. I try to encourage these connections whenever possible: "Could your question be maybe just what Twain is also writing to try to figure out? How are the difficulties you're having here and here similar to the difficulties Ellison is having, for example there and there? How might these be difficulties that at least parts of his culture were having then and that we might still be having now, in this classroom?"

But I do not want to suggest this can work only in a class in U.S. literature or culture. When students in such a class borrow terms and categories from elsewhere in the mix of cultures in which they live, we find ourselves just as valuably writing, thinking, and talking about not only continuities but also contrasts among the discourses, terms, and categories Twain, Ellison, or Hurston used and those we're using. This calls attention to social and historical differences that help us to situate and understand some of the contexts in which Hurston was writing in relation to the contexts in which our various students are reading and writing about her work. Reading Hurston comes to mean learning and practicing how to negotiate and translate among these different contexts that affect the meanings of what we read and write. Interpretations come to be judged less for their mystified correctness than for their ability to negotiate and translate meaning with others in the room (much as interpretations are judged in our profession: defining "the room" is one of the difficulties I've had writing this essay).

This is an often underestimated benefit to student writing from reading literature—again, not only U.S. literature—insofar as the different contexts of most literary writing can have a valuably estranging effect on the contexts for student writing, making those more immediate contexts more visible and specific. This requires, however, with regard to both literary and student writing, again, what Miller describes as an "approach to textual analysis that reverses the traditional formalist priority of textual 'meaning' over complex textual situations" (199).

Teaching *Beloved* with QHQs

I'd like to take my example from classes I've taught on Morrison's *Beloved*. In order to translate from the ongoing, particular classroom contexts to the different contexts of the present writing, I'm going to ghost-write a student QHQ that I remember several students asking different versions of in different classes, a QHQ that I've continued to think about. (In fact, I'm now writing a book about this QHQ, including examples and help from Morrison, Twain, Ellison, and Eliot.[8]) This QHQ would have been written on the first or second day of reading *Beloved:*

> I was interested in the story Denver starts telling again in the reading for today, where Amy Denver is helping Sethe to freedom and helping Sethe deliver Denver. What I don't understand is the way Amy talks. She sounds so racist and insensitive to Sethe's situation, but at the same time, she does help Sethe a lot. I guess that's my question: why can't Amy talk like she's helping Sethe?

If I were mapping this question at the board, I would be writing and grouping phrases as the student reads aloud. So far, I might have two clusters something like this, with a question below or between them:

way Amy talks:	helping Sethe to freedom
racist, insensitive	helping S deliver Denver

Q1: WHY CAN'T AMY TALK LIKE SHE'S HELPING?

Back to the student QHQ:

> One hypothesis would be that Amy may be helping Sethe out now, but she's not to be trusted. Sethe doesn't seem to trust her at first. She has told Denver, "You could get money if you turned a runaway over, and she wasn't sure this girl Amy didn't need money more than anything, especially since all she talked about was getting hold of some velvet" (77). Amy talks about velvet and good things to eat when Sethe seems like she's dying! And Amy keeps using very racist language. She doesn't sound like somebody Sethe would name her child after, especially considering all the stuff other white people have done to her. Even when Amy's helping Sethe, putting the spiderwebs on her back and massaging her feet, she talks about another black woman (though that's not what she calls her) who "don't know nothing, just like you. You don't know a thing. End up dead, that's what. Not me, I'm a get to Boston and get myself some velvet" (80). How insensitive can you get? The only explanation I can think of is that she's just used to talking that way, as if everybody she knows talks that way. Slavery must have made that seem okay, even expected. Sethe doesn't seem surprised, either. So she doesn't trust Amy completely (she doesn't tell Amy her real name).
>
> But she does trust her some. She even seems to like hearing Amy talk about velvet and good things to eat. I guess it's better

> than being alone. Also the baby seems to stop kicking. Maybe it's also encouraging for Sethe. Actually, now that I think of it, maybe it's encouraging for Amy to talk the way she does. That would be another hypothesis. It encourages her, makes her feel better than Sethe. But why does she need encouragement? Well, she does talk about being beaten, though she says it was never like this. Still, maybe she can imagine how a beating like this must feel. Another thing that might be even more important is her own mother. I thought it was strange she would sing that song about fairies that sounds like Shakespeare or something, but she says it's her "mama's song." So maybe Sethe, or Sethe's situation, reminds Amy of her own mother's situation. Her mother was an indentured servant and is dead now, I think. So maybe Sethe's situation gives Amy a chance to do something for her own mother, in a way.
>
> I guess that's my hypothesis. Amy talks the way she does because that's how she's been taught, but she helps Sethe as a way of dealing with her own memories of her mother and maybe her own beatings, things she doesn't know how to talk about. And Sethe trusts Amy because she recognizes Amy's talk of velvet and good things to eat not as insensitivity but as Amy's way of encouraging herself, and maybe a way Sethe can encourage herself, too. Somehow they do manage to do something wonderful together. As the book says, "There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well" (85).
>
> My follow-up question has to do with this last quote. What usually "disturbs" this kind of working together? The book mentions paterollers and preachers: Would that mean law and religion? Racism? The way people learn to talk?

Up at the board, I might have added phrases such as the following:

not to be trusted ($) -?- S nam'g Denver after AD

velvet, good thgs to eat -?- spiderwebs,
massaging "end up dead" -?- S dying!

used to this talk (slavery) (S not surprised)

encouraging to Amy (why?) <-->

encouraging to S?

(A's beatings: not same but) <--> S's beatings

(A's mama's song, situation) <--> S's situ'n

(A can't talk about these things)

A's helping is her way of dealing w/ own
memories of beat'gs, mother's & S's sit'n?

Q2: What usually disturbs such work? (law? religion? racism?
–way people learn to talk?)

As I check my map with the student writer and the other students, our discussion of this QHQ might well produce the observation that what Amy has trouble talking about in her encounter with Sethe is also hard for many of us to write or talk about in class. It is much easier for Amy to use the racist epithets, or for us to identify the racism and insensitivity in what Amy says, than to explain how their working together works. This QHQ might thus come to seem in the course of our discussion both a written exploration of and itself an example of the difficulty that Amy would have had in the 1850s, that Morrison had in the 1980s, that Amy's, Morrison's, and that our U.S. culture now *still* has in talking about how such racism and insensitivity might function not as an individual moral identity, as we tend to assume, but instead as a particular way of talking and thinking (what many now call a discourse) that may obscure other, different ways of talking and thinking and other, different ways of interacting. To expand on this (as the class discussion might, or as I might in my "second thoughts" in the next class, or in a later lecture), Amy tends too easily to label Sethe racially in something like the way that we may tend here too easily to label Amy morally—with an identity that in each case underestimates who the two of them are and what they can do together. Those more or less implicitly moral identities underestimate here especially how Sethe's presence and Amy's interaction with Sethe may allow Amy to deal with memories and emotions and with Sethe herself in ways that Amy's racism and insensitivity (considered as her moral identity) would seem to preclude.

A class discussion of this QHQ might also find an interesting opening in these cultural difficulties, for example, in the way Sethe seems here and at certain other times in the novel much more willing and able to speak of pain, death, and love than Amy and other characters are, which might suggest or connect with another interesting and related QHQ, addressing this same interaction or a similar interaction from Sethe's different position: How does Amy's presence and her talk of velvet and good things to eat encourage Sethe without requiring that she trust Amy absolutely? Ideas or hypotheses developed in these discussions might be tested on other events in the novel, in this or other discussions; for example, Paul D responds to Sethe's story first with a racist stereotype and later with the idea that "he wants to put his story next to hers" (273).

We might also compare the interaction between Amy and Sethe with that between Huck and Jim in Twain's novel, alluded to when Amy says she was looking for huckleberries when she found Sethe and when she then asks Sethe if she likes huckleberries (32). In this connection, I might mention now (as I would have even before Laurence B. Holland's suggestion) that in the 1880s when Twain wrote his novel, it was much easier for Twain's readers and probably Twain himself to congratulate Huck and themselves on the national moral effort to grant legal freedom to enslaved people like Jim during the Civil War than to dwell on the increasingly obvious national failure after the war (morally, socially, politically, economically) to flesh that legal freedom out "with the family, the opportunities, and the community that would give [that legal freedom a positive] meaning" (75).

With reference to more contemporary, local contexts for the class's difficulty articulating Amy's relationship with Sethe, or Huck's with Jim, I might add that the United States has had similar difficulty following through with the civil rights movement, with its emphasis on individual moral appeals, into affirmative action, with its different emphasis on the power of institutional and social forces beyond easy moral control. In the recent U.S. Senate campaign here in Louisiana, for example, David Duke could adapt slogans from the civil rights movement (adapted in turn from the Abolitionists, the U.S. Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence) about individual freedom from discrimination, but his opponents have had more difficulty finding ways to speak out effectively in mainstream discourse in favor of affirmative action and social programs. Instead of finding ways to reinterpret and rearticulate the resentments and frustrations of Duke's largely working-class white supporters in terms of different relationships with working-class blacks, opponents of Duke have tended to dismiss his supporters much as the town of St. Petersburg (and Twain's novel) dismisses Pap Finn, or as we might initially dismiss Amy Denver. I have to wonder if the Huck Finn who allowed himself to be seduced by Tom or the Amy Denver who seemed to talk only of velvet might in another time have supported David Duke, or might at least have been ineffectual against him. Some such discussion might suggest that many U.S. citizens talk and write more easily about condemning racism than we can about creating better conditions for difference, friendship, and democratic interaction.

Another class discussion of a QHQ like the one above might focus on the difficulty of mourning, in this incident but also in other similar incidents in this novel or in other QHQs or class discussions. We might consider the cultural forms of mourning available to Amy and Sethe as compared to others then and now, and whether those forms are appropriate or useful to Amy for mourning her mother's death or to Sethe or Denver for mourning Beloved's death. We might discuss our own national difficulty dealing with the memory, or lack of memory, for the "Sixty Million and more" named, or unnamed, in the dedication of Morrison's novel. This might connect with discussions of the role of ghosts and the uncanny in Morrison's novel. Still other discussions might focus on mother–infant or mother–daughter relationships.

But apart from these readings of *Beloved*, my general point here is that the typical student QHQ that might lead into such discussions is struggling in its own language with a cultural context that limits its possibilities in ways comparable to the ways Amy's cultural context limited her language and thought and action. At the same time, Amy and Sethe and Morrison and the student writer of this QHQ all try to challenge and find ways around those limitations.

Why Can't We Talk More about These Things?

I want to bring my own QHQ to an end, however, by referring briefly again to a few recent trends in research in literary criticism, in composition studies, and in pedagogy that may differently explain and support the use of strategies like this one to improve the teaching of literature and writing, especially in light of recent changes in the canon.

Research in literary criticism has suggested in a number of different ways that literary writing, much like student writing, is not just the expression of an author's autonomous genius or originality, but always also depends for its meaning and purpose and audience on being situated in certain contexts, including at least the culture(s) in which it is written and other cultures or communities in which it is read. This is not to say that literary writing is just the reflection of those cultures in which it is written or read. It can also function as an estranging effect or criticism of those cultures and as an anticipation of alternatives, even if the effects of that criticism are always necessarily subject to debate. A writing like Morrison's, for example, can be imagined as a kind of ongoing negotiation between the writer and her culture, sometimes merely reflecting or legitimizing that culture, sometimes criticizing it, and sometimes anticipating or articulating alternatives (perhaps sometimes doing so despite itself). And a writing like that of the student QHQ becomes another site of more or less conscious negotiation between this writer and his or her culture(s), sometimes reflecting the social context, and sometimes introducing or inventing a critical or anticipatory alternative, perhaps with the help of other reading, and perhaps with the help of other more or less local, popular, naive, discontinuous pockets of knowledge (as described by Michel Foucault and Michel Serres). Both the literary and the student writing are imaginative and critical efforts to think about and say what's hard to think about and say, to think about and say what doesn't go without saying. Perhaps that is why this kind of student writing, like literary writing, is sometimes challenging (but also exciting) to read.

Similar trends in composition research would confirm that our focus in student writing is not just the correct use of proper English conventions or good organization or the inclusion of recognizably important details, nor, on the other hand, is it only the student's authentic expression of his or her originality. In the last few decades of composition studies, "rhetoric's traditional wisdom that inquiry and purpose are a response to rhetorical situations" has been challenged by efforts at "nurturing a personal voice, individual purpose, or an inner, self-directed process of meaning making," but both these positions have also been complicated by other "assertions that inquiry in writing must start with social, cultural, or political awareness" (Flower 1989, 282). Both rhetorical situations and personal voices may be more informed by social, cultural, and political forces than we have tended to think, because the effect of such forces, after all, is to make such situations and voices appear natural and given. Student writing becomes, then, the site of more or less conscious and complex negotiations between students and their specific cultures, contexts, and conventions. Like literary writing, student writing becomes not just a more or less accurate reflection of variously required subject matters, nor just the expression of internal ideas, but a process of conscious negotiation, translation, and invention as student writers make their way among the more or less ready-made terms, ideas, and possibilities in their diverse and changing cultures, languages, situations, and selves.

As for pedagogical research, I would like to borrow two concluding hypotheses from Shoshana Felman, who has asked whether "teaching, like analysis, has to deal not so much with *lack* of knowledge as with *resistances* to knowledge" (602). One hypothesis she proposes is that "teaching, thus, is not the transmission of ready-made knowledge, it is rather the creation of a new 'condition' of knowledge—the creation of an original learning-disposition" (603). Strategies like QHQs, mapping, and discussions conceived as collaborative and interactive writing help to create this "learning disposition" in the classroom and in the essay. They make patterns of assumptions, and departures from and differences within those assumptions, subjects for attention. The other hypothesis I will borrow here has to do with creating much the same learning-disposition in the teacher. "The position of the teacher," writes Felman, "is itself the position of *the one who learns*, of the one who *teaches* nothing other than *the ways he learns*. The subject of teaching [the teacher] is interminably—a student; the subject of teaching [the subject matter] is interminably—a learning" (44). One thing I am learning from my observations of students' work, from their observations on their own work, and from their work together through the semester is that they are learning to read, to write, and to learn dramatically better than before.

I should end this rather long QHQ with a follow-up question: why don't we, or why can't we, talk more about these things?

Notes

1. I have adapted and developed this strategy from certain teaching practices of colleagues and teachers—John McBratney, Mitchell Breitwieser, and especially Ojars Kratins. It is not altogether different from the way many teachers conduct discussions, but for cultural and other reasons, I think it's important to give some of these practices a name, a rationale, and an institutional and practical form. We tend to talk more about the ways of teaching we want to avoid than the ways of teaching we want to affirm. But I also want to note Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee's caution that "it may be much more important to give teachers new frameworks for understanding what to count as learning than it is to give them new activities and curricula. Experienced teachers in particular have a large repertoire of activities that they can reorchestrate effectively as their own instructional goals change" (87). The teaching activity I describe here is one example of a different approach to student and literary writing. Other activities with a similar orientation are certainly taking place. In this regard, I also want to thank one present and two former graduate students in Curriculum and Instruction at LSU, John St. Julien, Susan Edgerton, and especially Mary Ann Doyle, who have taught me a great deal about teaching. Mary Ann Doyle has written more extensively about these particular teaching strategies in her doctoral dissertation.

2. Lindberg is focusing here on student writing, but he implies a similar understanding of how literary writing makes meaning, through a dialectic between the personal and the public, or in Flower's terms, the cognitive and the contextual.

3. Lindberg's instructions for his students' reading journals suggest that they make entries whenever their reading changes somehow, when they are surprised or puzzled, when they notice details that seem important, when the reading makes them speculate about life, and when their reading ends—"what 'ended?'" (120). All of these seem like good starting points for QHQs, though I would want to add an emphasis on the student's awareness

of the class context for reading aloud and discussing the QHQ. Good QHQs may start with a question about a previous class discussion or about a previous QHQ in the context of the new reading assignment.

4. The argument that writing "potentially provides for an expansion of the information that can be processed in our short-term memory at any one point in time" is one of several arguments by Michael White and David Epston for the value of writing in a family therapy setting, arguments that seem easily translated into a classroom setting. Drawing on Gregory Bateson and Michel Foucault, White and Epston also argue that writing "provides one mechanism through which persons can be more active in determining the arrangement of information and experience and in producing different accounts of events and experience"; that writing thus "promotes the formalization, legitimation, and continuity of local popular knowledges, the independent authority of persons, and the creation of a context for the emergence of new discoveries and possibilities"; and that "the detection of change is vital to the performance of meaning and to the experience of personal agency in one's life, and this detection of change is engendered by the introduction of a linear conception of time" as provided for in writing (35–37).

5. See Langer and Applebee on ownership, appropriateness, support, collaboration, and internalization as essential components of what they call instructional scaffolding (140–45).

6. See Bruffee, for example, on collaborative learning, and McQuade on the disciplinary hierarchy of literature and essay writing as primary and secondary forms of cultural production.

7. My co-panelist for the first version of this essay, Catherine Lewis of Southeastern Louisiana University, recommended in her paper that teachers encourage substantive revision by calling attention to the revision students already do in their rough drafts, the scratch-outs that they tend to think must be "disappeared." The QHQ would be another way to make that process of revision visible even in the finished product, as it also is in writers like Freud, who often considers and then rejects hypotheses, but leaves that process of hypothesizing visible, even central, in his writing (this is Shoshana Felman's reading of Freud's writing and teaching practice).

8. The unfinished manuscript of this book is called *Domination and Democracy in American Literature: Morrison, Twain, Ellison, Eliot* contracted with The University of Wisconsin Press. A revised section of this manuscript appeared in the Toni Morrison Special Issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* 39.3 (Spring 1994) as "'He Wants to Put His Story Next to Hers': Putting Twain's Story Next to Hers in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." Another spinoff from this QHQ is a work in progress entitled "A Continuity in the Southern White Dilemma: Would Huck Finn Vote for David Duke?," coauthored with Wayne Parent of the LSU Political Science Department. As John Carlos Rowe has written about "The New Pedagogy," "research for humanists . . . must have as its fundamental aim the adjustment of teaching practices and disciplinary knowledge to the cultural and social circumstances of the present" (774).

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10 Gender, Assessment, and Writing Instruction

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In the spring quarter of 1991, I taught an advanced expository writing course which I cross-listed as a women's studies course. Of the seventeen students, thirteen were female—eleven undergraduates (predominantly English majors) and two graduate students; four others were male. Because this course is required of all English majors and because mine was the only section being offered that semester, not all students "chose" this course for its content, focus or cross-listing. In fact, I was disappointed that I had to turn away the women's studies students unable to get into the course because it had been over-enrolled and because English majors were given priority.

In the course description, I set the following focus and objectives:

> This is a course intended for writers interested in exploring the experience of women overcoming silence in their writing. Students will read some theoretical articles about women's voices in writing and then confront different societal and educational forces that serve to silence these voices.

I listed three tentative objectives for the course: (1) to heighten students' awareness regarding the experience of women writing; (2) to achieve tolerance for women's voices in writing; and (3) to encourage alternative voices in students' writing, i.e., to overcome silences. The evaluation involved the students as participants in ongoing assessment of the course and their own writing.

By offering this course I not only wanted to guide students' exploration of the topic of women and silence, I was also interested in implementing some evaluation ideas a colleague and I had been experimenting with earlier in the academic year.[1] In order to contextualize the assessment I used, I will first describe some background which motivated the design of the course and its content.

Background

Teaching an expository writing class with a feminist focus presented several conflicts. I prepared the three tentative course objectives as required by my department, but I was uncomfortable doing so. Objectives, I argue, are based on a male model of education—top-down, authoritarian, teacher-centered. Feminist pedagogy, like Freirian pedagogy, is not authoritarian. It embraces the concepts of negotiation and cooperation, common in women's experiences, which stand in opposition to competition, achievement, and assertion which are more common in men's experiences and more highly valued in our educational institutions. So my first challenge was to convince my mostly female students that these objectives were open-ended and negotiable. I also had to convince them of the importance of their full participation in the planning, daily conduct, and assessment of the course—tasks traditionally the teacher's prerogative.

Second, I had to combat the students' firmly entrenched schema of what constitutes an essay. Typically, the term expository writing immediately conjures the following schema: an essay (probably five paragraphs) which analyzes a topic such that the thesis sentence is presented in the beginning and then developed and supported in a linear, logical way. This schema is considered such a given that one contrastive rhetorician diagrams this linear model as characteristic of all English language writing style (Kaplan 1966). Feminist compositionists claim that this model is a white "male" model, that women do not naturally examine topics or approach writing this way (Bolker 1979; Daumer and Runzo 1987; Drucker 1984; Farrell 1979; Hunter et al. 1988; Peterson 1986). In my course, we explored the alternatives available to us, taking a female voice in order to legitimize personal experience; allow for a female perspective of the world that is grounded in terms of "ambiguities, pluralities, processes, continuities, and complex relationships" (Thorne et al., 136);[2] and to empower women and men to understand how their writing (and related difficulties) connect with their sense of who they are in terms of gender.

I can almost hear some of my readers' inner voices rejecting my arguments—but consider this: we are all part of the educational establishment. As members, we have invested our academic egos in succeeding, and to do so we "had to" internalize the traditional model, quite unconsciously. Our own success and years of it have not allowed women or men to be in touch with the once alien-ness of learning to write. Feminist research on the experiences of women has documented how alienating, intimidating, and ultimately silencing the experience can be.[3] The "abuse begins in the early years, when girls' writing is more often rewarded for its conformity to neatness than for its creativity or ideas. As women progress through school, their ways of examining topics and their voices are systematically, albeit subtly, silenced. They either adopt the valued way of writing or they stop writing. "Not nowadays," I frequently hear. But the research is, in fact, quite current.

One of my own recent studies, excerpted and summarized below, identifies the subtle ways instructors respond to women's and men's writing differently and in favor of males. Recognizing the significant power exercised through teachers' responses to students' papers, I examined the possibility that gender-based expectations can be identified when teachers comment on student papers. Selected for the study were two student essays written in response to an assignment posing a moral issue involving a daughter, Judy, and her mother. Each essay exhibited gender-based stereotyped linguistic/stylistic and rhetorical features described in the research (see Figure 1, taken from the original study, p. 147).

The essay's authors were given the fictitious names of Martha Ambrose and Richard Hardin. Martha's essay exhibited several of the stereotypic female features listed above. First, her essay was "female-appropriate" in topic and content. As a female, Martha valued the mother–daughter relationship and presented solutions intended to help Judy preserve this relationship. Martha also related to the situation in a personal and empathetic way, focusing on hurt feelings, even sharing what she would do in Judy's place and how she would feel. Her essay was basically mechanically correct, containing full subjunctive forms and complex sentence patterns. She was "wordy" when compared to Richard (see below). She chose several "female" words like *lovely, precious,* and *utterly.* Finally, her

Female	**Male**
"Female-appropriate" topic	"Male-appropriate" topic
Correctness	Ungrammaticality
Emotionality	Logicalness
Tentativeness	Forcefulness
"Nice" words	Vulgarity and slang
Verbosity	Terseness
"Female" word choice	"Male" word choice

Figure 1. Stereotyped features of gendered writing.

solutions were offered more tentatively, as evidenced by her use of words like *probably* and the hypothetical subjunctive. Richard's essay exhibited the stereotypic "male" features. He argued at a universal level of parent–child relationships. His opinion as to what has happened was unequivocal—Judy's mother is wrong. He reiterated his point forcefully with *must* and short sentences and moved detachedly from generalities about parents and children to Judy and her mother. His essay was comparatively terser than Martha's, containing only 305 words and averaging only 10.5 words per T-unit, compared to Martha's 550 words with 18.3 words per T-unit. He used some vulgarity and slang to emphasize his position. Finally, his essay contained mechanical errors, including one fragment and one comma splice.

These two essays were distributed to colleagues in our first-year writing program. Of the thirty-four who returned the essays, eighteen were males and sixteen were females. My colleagues had been divided into two groups of nearly equal numbers of males and females. One group, consisting of eleven males and nine females, received Martha's and Richard's essays as originally written; the other group, consisting of seven males and seven females, received the same essays with the authors' names switched. This was done to see if the supposed gender of the writer influences the quantity and quality of the comments teachers write. At the time of distribution, my colleagues were asked to write comments on the two essays as they normally would if they had received the essays in English 101, our first-term writing class. Their comments were analyzed using a schema based on the elocutionary force and focus of the comments.

Surface findings showed insignificant gender bias. However, a closer examination of the comment distributions revealed gender differences along two dimensions: by gender of indicated author and by gender of the teachers. Male teachers tended to be generally intolerant of emotional writing but even more critical when the author was female. Female teachers tended to be more fastidious generally, but especially with the female author, about the language and mechanics of an essay, and more concerned about the form of the essay, requiring it to conform to the male rhetorical tradition described previously. Both responded positively to Richard's forcefulness when it bore his name, but criticized it when the indicated author was female.

My findings reinforce previous research illustrating that male and female students have different academic experiences. It also reinforces claims from feminist critics that women's written voices are not as accepted as men's written voices. My findings show that a female student "voice" is less tolerated when the writing is attributed to a female author. Richard's permission to violate the male rhetorical norm (by placing his thesis statement at the end of his essay) and still be acceptable contrasts sharply with Martha's experience—her empathy and conductive logic draw harsh attention. Yet, when the indicated names were switched, "Martha" (Richard) was criticized while "Richard" (Martha) was praised for the very same rhetorical approaches just mentioned. This finding supports that gender indeed played a role in the way my colleagues commented on these essays.

Eliminating the gender bias I have described above requires awareness and sensitization among administrators and writing teachers. We must understand that what we *write* on students' papers is as powerful interactively and academically as what we say. Gender equity workshops can help faculty identify the different kinds of comments they might be giving to men and women in oral and written comments. Once aware, each of us needs to practice gender-neutral reading of and commenting on students' papers, learning to value female student writers' *author*ity as well as the voices of traditional authority. This is a difficult feat. It means we must give up our fixed images of standard academic discourse, as Bridwell-Bowles refers to it (350).[4] We must attempt to see our students' efforts at alternative discourses through their eyes, avoid applying a generalized model of rhetorical and linguistic standards, and acknowledge powerful and honest prose in many forms.

When I train teaching assistants, I share my research and attempt to foster acceptance of alternative voices by discussing papers written in nontraditional female voices. I start with a research paper I wrote a decade ago that uses a strongly female-marked voice. Most males in the class almost immediately reject the article as nonscientific. The females generally feel comfortable with it. When pressed, the males cite the personal voice, use of personal examples, and the lack of a scientific argument (with the hypothesis and findings presented up front) as most troubling. This discussion allows us to explore our rhetorical and linguistic values, our reactions and alternatives.

Content

Reconciling these conflicts and implementing gender-neutral practice for my course were not easy tasks. I spent months reading various accounts of women writers to find those which most pointedly made the arguments about silence.[5] I also examined theoretical analyses of censorship of women's writing. While much of the latter is provocative reading, I finally decided that some of the works contained highly sensitive, if not inflammatory, subjects—rape, lesbianism, etc. Aware that I was guilty of censorship, I felt my own discomfort in assigning such topics in class too great. Ultimately, however, students themselves raised many of these topics in the discussions of silence.

In the end, I took essays from Adrienne Rich, excerpts from Tillie Olsen's *Silences*, and excerpts from the book *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. I also wanted to share with students how writing instruction and experiences in school silence women. To that end, I shared various scholarly articles about feminist pedagogy and feminist composition. We began the term by viewing the Australian film *My Brilliant Career* and Masterpiece Theater's *A Room of One's Own*. I asked them to record their responses and reactions to the readings, films, and discussions in their journals. In keeping with the course goals, I invited the voices of my students. Not only did their growing texts become the focus of class discussion and writing, but as students became more engaged in the ideas, they brought in various artifacts of women's silence. Several students connected course ideas with the film *Thelma and Louise*. Two students pursued the role of religions in silencing women, especially feminist analyses of witch burnings. Others brought in poems, newspaper clippings, and magazine articles on related topics. All were incorporated into class discussions and class journals.

It was my hope that all the students would become unsilenced writers—bilingual, adept in "female" and "male" writing. I advocated writing as process and collaborative learning, both of which are in tune with feminist pedagogy. In other words, I used what has become the way many of us teach writing. Additionally, students maintained dialogue journals; dialogue as part of relating and connecting has been established as natural to most women's ways of knowing and learning. Actually, I expanded the dialogue journal into a "class" dialogue involving students and teacher together, rather than a one-on-one dialogue between student and teacher. The purpose of the class dialogue journal was to document and analyze what was learned. In addition, students were asked to maintain an individual class journal in which they recorded their responses to the readings, described what was going on in the class, and reacted to it. Every student was to have a voice in this class journal by taking a turn recording the events of the day, sharing responses and interpretations from their individual journals, and posing questions. In these journals, they recorded reactions to readings and films and then responded to these reactions to find connections and further implications. In the beginning, students engaged in dialogues with writing partners so that they could become familiar with the nature of written conversation for learning. Then they extended this conversation to the class dialogue journal. Class members were given opportunities to respond to each other, add their own thoughts, and revise what had been logged for the day. I also had a voice by responding to their questions and providing my own interpretation of class events *after* the class had finished—not so that I had the last word but so that I did not influence what was being generated, and so that my teacher voice did not overpower or invalidate theirs.

The course met in the department's computer classroom. Research has shown that computers facilitate the writing process. I knew that learning word processing might be new and challenging for some students, so I fostered the attitude that it was a challenge worth accepting. I explained how the computer could serve them as a powerful tool to enhance their writing and modelled ways to use the computer at all stages of the writing process. While I encouraged students to integrate computers into their entire writing process, they were free to explore ways that were comfortable for them.

Since computer classrooms also foster writing as a public endeavor, I worked to create a community of writers built on trust and respect for each other's efforts (again, relevant to women's ways of being). To that end, we discussed each other's papers in a large group through the use of a simple network system that allowed me to project one person's screen to the entire class. We also responded to each other's papers in peer review sessions. They learned how to recognize and overcome the judgmental, corrective language of traditional "teacher talk" (such as *this lacks details; this is awkward; a stronger thesis statement needed*) and use language that shows engagement and consideration. They were to ask questions, raise issues and ideas, provide insight, and offer praise. In addition, I encouraged neighbors to read each other's writing on screen and help each other informally.

Evaluation and Assessment

I used a qualitative model of evaluation and assessment that incorporates the increasingly familiar writing portfolio and the class dialogue journal. The portfolio method of writing assessment forces teachers to contextualize individual student writing within a collection of each student's work. However, as Christina Stover and I have argued, this context should consist of classroom events as well. We take our cue for this idea from two sources. First, ethnographers like Shirley Brice Heath have documented the value of interpreting student performance within a broader context of community and school. Second, researchers like Elliot Eisner argue for a model of assessment that "supplements . . . the use of scientific procedures . . . through a dialectic between educational connoisseurship and educational criticism . . ." (93). Eisner identifies three aspects of this connoisseurship and criticism: description of classroom phenomena, interpretation of meaning and significance of classroom phenomena, and evaluation of conclusions drawn from description and interpretation" (Eisner 182–83). We contend that the class dialogue journal provides the necessary context in which to assess student writing performance by gauging the papers in the portfolios against the students' and our descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations.

By involving students in their own assessment, I was attempting to restore balance in authority and class power structures. Students became full partners in their own assessment. The instructions I gave to guide the students in their evaluation were the following:

> You are to choose the three papers which best demonstrate the *range* of your writing abilities—the humor, the insight, the sensitivity, the anger, whatever. Then prepare a letter to me in which you discuss each paper to guide me in my evaluation. Tell me why you like each paper, what writing skill(s) it demonstrates, what you attempted to do and what you think you revised successfully to accomplish your goal. Explain for me what you learned from the class, referring to your personal and the class log for specifics. Then tell what grade you would give each paper individually and how you would assess your coursework as a whole.

For final evaluation, students submitted portfolios containing what they perceived as their best writings, and the class dialogue journal became the context in which they examined their portfolios. Naturally, the papers students submitted varied considerably. Some students prepared research papers; some reviewed books or films related to silence or women's place. Some wrote autobiographical stories about silence, while others wrote personal responses to ideas. Most attempted to "try on" voices different from their safe "school" voices; a few were unwilling to go far from it. What made these papers fascinating to read was the level of commitment from each student as expressed by their emotional stances: anger, empowerment, compassion, skepticism, irony, and sarcasm. Because I had participated as a partner in this process, I defined my final role as one who would verify their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses in their writings and the degree to which their writing fulfilled *their* intended goals. I trusted that we had established multiple criteria for good writing and that they would tell me which criteria applied to individual papers and why. In this way I did not apply a single standard to every paper nor did I devote time to exorcising every error. I was able to balance my role as partner with my role as teacher–evaluator. This method of evaluation was much more difficult for them than for me. I can better describe why this was successful by sharing excerpts of their letters and by discussing in further detail my responses to both their writing and their letters.

Student Portfolio Evaluation Letters

Confronted with nontraditional expectations, students seemed to find it difficult initially to take responsibility for finding their own tasks and structures.

> I thought the challenge you offered us was going to be simple: no guidelines, few restrictions; what could be so hard about that? I struggled and I struggled. Eventually, I conquered. . . . Now I'm spoiled. Allowing us to be creative and "free" in our writing has been too good to be true! [MW]
>
> Never have I learned as much or enjoyed myself more in a class than in this English [class]. The purpose of allowing our initial frustration at the lack of structure and direction became clear as I struggled to find my own path and rate of personal growth—and found it! The atmosphere in this class was one of openness, encouragement, self-introspection, sharing, intellectual and emotional stimulation, honesty, acceptance, understanding and appreciation of individuality. It reminded me of a Montessori class for adults. What environment more conducive to advanced composing could a student ask for? [LB]
>
> I feel I learned a lot in this class through trial and error and self-searching. You filled the role you needed to, that of a role model, someone with suggestions for improvement, and a person who raised questions for us to think about and incorporate into our lives. . . . I can write again with your help. [CD]

Many students explicitly referred to their journals in their self-evaluations.

> My paper about the Black Woman started out to be just a daily journal entry on my part about a classroom discussion. I talked to my Mom about some of the silencing she had to overcome, the influences, and who were some of the Black women voices she remembered. Two words did it for me—Angela Davis. That's all it took for me to . . . try to find literature on her life and other Black women and their trying to overcome their silence. [NA]

> My journal was my one successful source of writing and really aided my learning. I do feel that I was able to add to our class discussions each day and bring a man's perspective to the issues we discussed. [NR]

> I recorded a lot of ideas in my journal. I got lots of impetus from our class discussions which I think is unfortunately a rare but quite welcome change in college life . . . I was a little leery about what this class would be about and maybe a little intimidated since I became a part of a real minority [one of the four males] for the first time in a class. But I soon felt right at home and probably put more voluntary input into this class than any other class that I've been in since I started college. [TZ]

One student wrote a twelve-page letter to me about his work. He cited several excerpts from his journal—all indicating the intellectual and personal growth he had experienced. He concluded with these lines:

> Although getting a grade is important to me, there is more to learning than just getting a grade. From this class, I am taking a new awareness of what it means to be silenced. . . . In my first journal entry, I had written, 'I'm not exactly sure what it means to be silenced.' Little did I know that I had been silenced all my life and was unaware of it. [CS]

All students responded positively to the topic of silence. Two students (one male, one female) wrote about how they had experienced silence in school. The male wrote this in his assessment of the paper he wrote on the topic:

> My intention is to give a possible explanation for the lack of a human voice in much of the writing done by students in high school and college; students are not taught to write in their own voice but in a nonhuman voice to suit the expectations of teachers and professors. [TZ]

The female wrote,

> I have been silenced in school more times than I can count . . . and I attempted to show how students are being silenced, and to a lesser extent why that is so bad. [JH]

On overcoming her "self-induced silence," one student wrote,

> Until I began working on this project, I was almost convinced that I would never be capable of relating my private inner thoughts in an articulate manner. A large part of me had been suppressed due to concern over what others would think if they read what I had written. [MB]

Students' arguments for their grades were generally insightful, although some were a bit self-deprecating as if fulfilling an appropriately subordinate student role. The following illustrate the extremes of responses to the task of giving themselves a grade:

> It is difficult for me to be objective and grade my own course work. Remember, we are used to you doing that. [NA]
>
> I hate grades, I hate all of this assessment, it's so patriarchal. Why do we have to have grades, it just makes people crazy. [CS]

From their letters, I learned much about what these students valued in writing: the quality of writing, the difficulty of the task they set for themselves, the power of the writing to raise questions in readers' minds, the synthesis of ideas and emotions, and the extent of revisions. I took these criteria as evidence of their engagement in the class and of their having assumed responsibility for their part in the course. I also viewed these as important lessons learned, lessons I could not have prepared or taught. In reading their letters, I felt their full affirmation of the goals for the course.

Contextualized Teacher Evaluation

Because I had defined my role as a participant in the class process, I had to practice a different commenting style throughout the course. First, I never graded anything, and I never read hard copies. Students presented drafts on computer disk. My comments were saved in nonprintable boxes so that their texts were kept intact. As practice for the final portfolio evaluation, they had to tell me what kind of reading they wanted from me: to check sentence structure, to respond to some new technique, to answer questions, or to evaluate the effectiveness and power of a section. My responses started as letters to them in direct response to their focused queries. Then, interspersed in the text, I recorded reactions that occurred during my reading.

At the end of the course, when I received their portfolios, I read what they felt to be their strengths and improvements both in specific pieces and as writers. Then I weighed their arguments against the record (the log) of the class. In all but one case, the student and I agreed on the assessment of the portfolio and on the final grade. Perhaps no other of my portfolio responses illustrates the partnership better than the letter excerpted below. CS wrote in his letter to me that his first essay had the clearest voice and showed his courage and his ability to tell a story that draws the reader into a painful memory from his battered childhood. In his revisions, he altered the title to prepare his readers for what was to follow, limited the story to one event, found a stronger ending, and explained more to help his readers understand where he was coming from. Here is my response:

> Dear CS,
>
> I saved your portfolio for last, consciously, because I knew I had an exciting adventure ahead. You and a few others in the class really found voice, confidence, and excellence during the quarter. As you stated, you wrote more than ever; you became a writer. It showed. These pieces are excellent. I loved your poem, your journal odyssey, your papers. I'd like copies of any of your papers you'd like me to have. Your hard work in your journal, in the class dialogue journal and in your papers earned an *A*.
>
> First Paper—I like all the papers, but I agree that this is a fine one. I like how the story of your father's beating you ends. The reader feels your conflict—I sensed the possibility of shame as you emerged from the house; instead, there's comfort as if collective shame and compassion were there for you. If you were able to let that happen in such a way, Wow! You really learned how to survive.

I concurred with CS that his work in the course had earned an *A*.

As stated earlier, I did not agree with one student's self assessment. In her letter to me, she wrote of her third paper that she tried to write a reader-based piece that explored the differences in genders from a societal point of view. She argued that the media and one's peers perpetuate gender stereotypes. She stated that her purpose was to raise questions about the role of society. In her revision, she attempted to broaden some areas. While I found many strengths in her writing as a whole, I did not find her successful in achieving her goals for this piece. Out of context, my comments reflect the kind of responses I advocate not making. I appear to be devaluing her emotional voice. But in the context of what she attempted to do, I am commenting on the effectiveness of her approach to fulfill her goal.

> Dear CD,
>
> Your writing has so many strengths. You conjure wonderful images and analogies. You channel anger into humor but keep the cutting edge. You draw on deep emotions. These are to be nurtured. You'll notice the many check marks in all the papers;

> these mark distracting spelling (by the way, my name is Laube) and *minor grammar considerations, and typos. . . . Throughout* your papers, you will find numbers in the margin, which I discuss below.
>
> Third Paper—This paper was your weakest. It has an extremely important message, but it is an uneven "emotional" approach to a reader-based topic that required more logic and thoughtful analysis. You present it as a journey of discovery; you hint that you observed. These suggest some "method" not unlike a scientist or sociologist; instead, we get subjective and wrong observations as with Note 4—You do not establish what these people are about as stereotypes. Note 5—comes from nowhere; your paper (to sum up) has not been about man loves woman. You simply lose your thought. This paper was a C.

However, since most students met their assessment goals, my belief in involving students in their own assessment was affirmed. In fact, when the class ended, I knew something special had happened to us all—so special that I have not even begun to capture it in these pages. Bridwell-Bowles has described her own experience as "invigorating experimentation" with diverse discourse (366); my own experience stands out as a professional high point. The key points that distinguished this course are applicable to any writing course: (1) We were all "equal" in the pursuit of understanding silence. Each of us had experiences we could draw on to begin discussions. And we each had different avenues of exploration open to us. (2) We were all committed to and responsible for the success of the course. I was not the center, the focus of knowledge. I became both a guide and spectator. Many times I simply stepped aside while students conducted class discussions. (3) Students found real audiences and purposes for their writing instead of writing to suit me. They did not expect me to tear apart their papers, as their other teachers generally did. Instead, I responded with candor and curiosity to their ideas. They felt free to use my ideas and to answer my questions as fit their intent.

Implications for General Education

Whether we are interested in creating gender-neutral or ethnic-neutral classroom environments and commenting styles, I believe we need not avoid the obvious—our students do represent various groups and have varying voices. I would argue that by inviting the full participation and voice of all our students, regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, or nationality, we create a true democracy stripped of hierarchies and stiff traditions. But doing so is wrought with challenges. As Stover and I have documented, teachers may resist the altered roles just as much as students can. Students pull on us to fill our traditional roles and to give them what they want—the easiest way to please us. Teachers may disempower students or feel "guilty" about not doing their job as expected. Stover writes of her disappointment that the student did not write what she expected after conferences about the student's research paper on the 1960s.

> Not only are our students continuously trying to please us, but we also interpret the student's text for our own meaning as well as for what we think they mean. . . . Even though I thought I was helping her achieve independence from me, I was simply giving her what she wanted of me—assistance in understanding "what *I* want." In doing so, I inhibited her ability to work independently from me and strangled any empowerment I was trying to create. (3)

Additionally, while I believe all students deserve such a validating experience and most will learn, grow, and change from it, not all students are willing to take risks in their writing or embrace the topic of diversity with enthusiasm. Several of my students apologized in their journals for not being able to depart from the traditional rhetorical style. Hearing my urging them to experiment as a mandate to do so, they reinvented the game of giving me "what I want." My most skeptical student, who became the focus of some discussion in an entry to the class dialogue journal because of some silencing and insensitive behavior, seemed invulnerable to the energy of the class. He read the course materials and participated readily in class but with overt resistance and distaste for our discussions. I monitored his behavior and the class's response to him so that everyone acted respectfully and gave full ear, conscious of a strong impetus to silence him. Nevertheless, he wrote one paper about a Native American woman "who could not be silenced by well-heeled powers" and another in which he really stretched his writing style to include humor and personal "soapy" (his word) emotions.

Finally, our colleagues teaching other classes may not accept the diverse voices we have empowered. The very nature of general education is normalizing in terms of how students should go about learning, thinking, and writing. Many of the arguments against empowering such voices boil down to the threat posed to the power base held by the faculty. By imposing academic standards, the faculty meet the expectations of some students, administrators, and the society at large. Not until we alter our view of general education to embrace diversity will we truly see a college-educated population prepared to exercise self-determination within a spirit of community and cooperation.

Notes

1. In our 1991 CCCC presentation, Christina M. Stover of Belleville Area College and I documented early efforts to get students involved in ongoing personal and course assessment.

2. Thorne et al. offer a linguistic account echoing Carol Gilligan's observations of women's moral decisions. Consult Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) for a fuller understanding.

3. See, for example, Mary de Nys and Leslie R. Wolfe, "Learning Her Place—Sex Bias in the Elementary School Classroom," *Peer Report* 5 (1985, Washington, DC: Project on Equal Education Rights, p. 5)

4. Bridwell-Bowles' article examines the underlying values of language and written texts within the academy. She describes her experimentation with diverse discourses in her writing courses.

5. Bridwell-Bowles lists some additional material relevant to the topic of silence and alternative voice.

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11 The Discourses of "Difference" in a Feminist Classroom: Multiplicity and the Pedagogical "Unconscious"

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> Within feminism, for example, recognition of the doubled movement of inscription and subversion presses one to acknowledge the ways in which feminism is both outside the discourse of the fathers and, simultaneously, inscribed in Western logocentrism, patriarchal rationality, and imperialistic practices.
>
> —Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*

As a classroom instructor, I rarely examined my own assumptions about teaching literature. The approach I proudly touted rested upon a firm and unquestionable Great Books foundation and an unassailable New Critical orientation. The *meaning* of literature was located within the leaves of our anthologies. My job was to imaginatively resuscitate the author—dead, white, middle-class, and male—long enough to pose plausible interpretations of *his* (i.e., *the*) meaning, locating corollary motifs through analysis of plot, characters, and theme. In an effort to refigure these "common sense" (Mayher 1990, 13) teaching practices—the teacher-led and (classic) text-centered approaches that predominate in the research on literature classrooms (Applebee 1993; Huber 1992; Huber and Laurence 1989; Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith, 1995)—I recently conducted a qualitative study of three sections of a required undergraduate literature course. The issues that arose in these classrooms were dramatized most poignantly in the class taught by Lillian, a feminist and subcommittee leader of the department's task force on cultural diversity. Lillian carefully selected an array of literatures by and about women, people of color, and the marginalized. However, as Lillian expanded her repertoire of texts, she also broadened the scope of discussion, broaching social, personal, and political issues as well as textual matters, encouraging a plurality of student perspectives. In this chapter I will trace the effects of her efforts to encourage multiple responses to literature by focusing on student discussion and writing, making visible the discursive disjunctions that arose as students shifted from oral to written discussion. We will begin this investigation by tracing the assumptions that shaped Lillian's approach, then examine how her efforts to encourage multiplicity alternately promoted and constrained student response.

Lillian's Goals: "There's Not Just Spenser"

With five years of experience teaching rhetoric and literature classes, Lillian came highly recommended by her program director. A middle-class Anglo and a Renaissance scholar who taught in the Women's Studies Department, Lillian subscribed to a version of feminism that emphasizes analyses not only involving gender issues, but also race, class, ethnicity, and other markers of difference. She explained her orientation this way:

> Quite simply we're born into this world as loving human beings without a sense of the differences that separate us. Then we are taught a hierarchy of value based on what sex we are, what class we are, what religion we are, and what our abilities are—both physical and mental. . . . Since we learn those behaviors—ways of separating ourselves from others, ways of seeing—we can unlearn them.

Reading in this class would embrace text, self, and culture—the worlds of writers as well as readers, Lillian claimed, echoing material-feminist literary theorists and critics (Newton and Rosenfelt 1985). She emphasized the importance of the literatures she chose in promoting such analyses; issues of gender, race, and class were, she explained, "embedded" in the texts she consciously selected.

Yet, understanding literature involved knowledge not only of texts but also of the cultures and histories of writers and readers. She stressed,

> You want students to be aware that there's a cultural context. I mean there wasn't just Spenser—but Spenser was a member of a class that was 2 percent of the population.

Given the texts she selected, the discussion questions she posed, and the writing prompts she designed, Lillian hoped that classroom communicative acts would include cultural critique. She used early forums to socialize students into a community where "what you want them to be is readers, not necessarily of books when they leave the classroom . . . but of the world." She explained that "drawing in examples from life" and exploring the ways in which "stories about lives get woven in" with the texts they read, students would realize that they "do not exist in a vacuum in this class." Hoping to link textual matters with social justice issues, Lillian and her students discussed a range of topics that exceeded *explication de texte.*

Students were invited to extend their emergent analyses through both formal and informal writing. While the journal topics and entry formats were "open," the formal paper provided an occasion to crystallize a single viewpoint and defend it, Lillian reported. She clarified the relationship between discussion and the writing of the formal papers:

> What I was trying to get them to see is that it's not simply a matter of opinion—it's a matter of how one presents a case. One can convince you of something by garnering or presenting certain evidence that is going to persuade you. Are there more or less effective ways of doing that? I think they are learning this in the process of writing [the formal paper] because I ask them to take a stand; and in class I allow them to wander more and to be more exploratory, as in the reading responses they write for class.

Classroom discussions and journals provide the forums for "exploratory" thinking, and the formal papers offer the opportunity to "take a stand," Lillian suggests. Underscoring the importance of "how one presents a case," she emphasizes the importance of "garnering or presenting certain evidence." Yet, while Lillian's careful text selection and deliberate pedagogical strategies did culminate in discussions that fostered multiplicity, the effects on student writing were slightly different, as we will see in the following sections.

The Dynamics of "Difference": The "Us" of the Class Encounters the "Other" of the Text

Embodying Lillian's goals for exploring cultural as well as textual issues, students focused on the ending of Nadine Gordimer's "The Catch," a story set in South Africa about a middle-class Anglo couple who befriends a lower-class Indian fisherman. When the couple, in the company of upper-class Anglo acquaintances, sights the Indian on the roadside carrying an unwieldy fish, they offer him a ride. However, when their Anglo friends become visibly annoyed at being detoured by the Other, the Anglos abandon the Indian on the roadside, far from his destination and burdened with the fish.

We can see how Lillian's careful orchestration of teaching and learning yielded an interpretive community marked by plurality and a resistance to closure. Students problematized the ending of the story, that which showcases the mistreatment of the Indian by the Anglos:

> *Sue:* I didn't like the way that at the end there were really two things. They were so excited about the fish, and they were running down there and wanted to have their picture taken and wanted to get the picture developed and thought that was the neatest thing, him bringing it [the fish] down with the film. It was like this big thing and then all of a sudden their friends show up, and it's like they're really embarrassed by him. I really didn't like that at all. I don't think this is really prejudice, but I think maybe at one point it wasn't racial prejudice; it might have been a class thing. I don't know, but it was like all of a sudden when their friends were around they were really embarrassed by their earlier interests; and I think if they would have conveyed how excited they had been in the beginning, then maybe their friends would have picked up on it instead of staying in the back seat mad because they weren't eating and couldn't even go anywhere.
>
> *Dan:* I agree with that, but I saw it as a kind of society. Like when we take a vacation, and you go somewhere, and there's no one around and that's kind of how you are. You just look at some things you normally don't. But then when their friends showed up, it was a reminder of the society they came from and how they acted there. You mentioned that they realized they had been having fun. They were enjoying themselves, but just not in the way their friends were used to. Society came back into their lives.
>
> *Lillian:* That's really interesting.
>
> *Mary:* Yeah, well, I thought it was a racial thing because I noticed, particularly in one part, about how the fish got in, the fish down the road and the Indian—and the white couple was driving down the road, and the husband said something about the man, and the wife said, "Oh, no, *they*'re used to that kind of work." I was really annoyed with the couple because I didn't think they recognized the old man's identity as a person. They just romanticized the vacation experience but didn't care about him.
>
> *Andrea:* Then again it [the story] said something unfortunate, that the fact that he was an Indian troubled him "hardly at all," and they had almost forgotten he was an Indian. I thought they had thought of him as just one of them, that he was just an old friend. It said on page 472 that they were envious of the fisherman's life that he led.

In this exchange, students claim variously that the Anglo couples are racist; that they are not racist but classist; that they are neither racist nor classist but envious of the fisherman; that they are individuals for whom "vacation" signifies a release from social as well as from professional obligations; and that society, not the individual, should be faulted for oppressing Indians. These opinions coexist simultaneously as students work to open up texts and discussions, seeking to understand an ostensible act of injustice. They generate a polyphony of divergent perspectives on the question of how to "read" the mistreatment of the Indian by the Anglos, thereby providing an index to the "heteroglossia" of the text and the discussion (Bakhtin 1981, 272; Belsey 1980, 129; Petrosky 1992, 171). In this plenitude neither teacher nor student moves toward closure or attempts to synthesize contradictory positions; students, following Lillian's lead, have learned to tolerate ambiguity and to promote dissensus in order to enrich their understandings.

We can also chart the diverse ways of knowing demonstrated in Lillian's class by tracing the formation of "evidence." In the previous exchange, the final speaker garnered evidence by directly quoting text, and the first speaker paraphrased. Because the text provided support for the speaker's comments, it might be argued that the discussion offered a direct link to strategies which might be useful in writing formal papers: three of the four speakers relied on the text to support assertions.

Yet textual knowledge was supplanted by other sources. For instance, in the previous passage Dan's turn did not garner details from the literature. Rather, the evidence he used came from reader experience and knowledge. Relying on his classmates' assumed experience of the ways in which a vacation signifies not only a geographical but a psychological and social distance from one's norms and routines, he claimed that the Anglos exhibit behaviors to be expected of vacationers. In so doing, he used experience, rather than the text, to "support" his point that they did not practice discriminatory behavior toward the fisherman.

There were many other occasions in which students' personal experience and knowledge of oppression, rather than the plot, served as the focus of inquiry. For instance, after exploring the ways in which racism was transmitted and reinforced by popular culture and media, Lillian urged students to reflect on how they were implicated in the perpetuation of racism. She encouraged students to discuss and to clarify their own perspectives about issues of social justice because those attitudes infused their readings. Andy, a middle-class Anglo American disclosed,

> I've got a black girlfriend, and I've dated black girls over the last two years. I think people can; I know a lot of interracial relationships. I don't think they're unmanageable. Maybe everyone is racist or classist in a subconscious way, but that doesn't make people bad. It just means that it's a fact; it's going to happen. It's not bad; it's just hard to deny it. It's never going to be perfect.

From there, students explored and debated the role of television and other media in creating and transmitting racist ideologies. They also discussed the relationship between racism and classism in our society. In short, in these analyses the text might be considered a springboard, not the source or the supporting evidence, for the discussion of how oppression is perpetuated. Furthermore, while some of the conversation was devoted to the development of argument, not all of it was. Here, for instance, the overriding purpose was to explore *how*, rather than to argue *that*, social inequities were transmitted via popular culture and media. In this discussion, as we have seen, students not only displayed a variety of conflicting positions, but they illustrated and defended those claims with a variety of elaborative strategies. They explored the marginalization of the Other, charting how race and class differences resulted in inequities in the text, in South African society, and in contemporary U.S. society. In the next section we will see how these multiple ways of knowing alternately prompted and stymied the writing of the formal papers.

Discussion Versus the Formal Papers: Dissonances and Disjunctions in Multiplicity

The initial invitation which Lillian extended offered students two options. They could (1) "choose a short passage or scene from one of the stories and rewrite it, using a different point of view" and then "reflect on the effects which the change in point of view" produced or (2) "explore the ways in which the author attempts to bring us to see a character as a mix of 'good' and 'bad'—that is, as human in complexity." Lillian designed these prompts to enable students to gain a "heightened awareness of choices that writers are making to get them to respond in certain ways." In so doing, she hoped to foster a greater awareness that texts, and the social justice issues represented therein, were constructed to create certain effects on readers.

We can illuminate the tensions which emerged in tandem with Lillian's emphasis on multiplicity by focusing on the composing experiences of two students in the class. Both Rick and Mary had been *A* students in the prerequisite rhetoric series and in their college preparatory English classes, and both chose to write the first paper on "The Catch." Echoing comments Lillian made in class, in separate interviews they both emphasized the importance of "a clear thesis and strong supporting evidence." Mary stressed a "good supply of examples" to "back up your thesis." The best evidence, she declared, came from "within the text." While structure and support were important, Mary reported that Lillian wanted to hear the writer's voice in the paper; otherwise, the papers sounded "monotonous" and "drab." In her view, "Lillian lets our personal opinion come into it all."

While recognizing the characteristics of "good" papers in Lillian's class, both, as experienced and savvy students, understood that "what she really wants," as Rick said, would only become visible in her comments and grading on the papers—despite Lillian's encouragement of a range of ways of knowing. Mary explained, "Because there's a difference in every class you walk into, it takes the first paper to realize what the teacher is expecting from you." Mary, hoping to clarify what Lillian was "expecting," brought a draft of her paper to Lillian. Using Lillian's comments to revise, she submitted her final paper. Written on "The Catch" in response to the second prompt, this excerpt analyzes the construction of the fisherman as the Other:

> The couple felt extremely torn between the humble Indian and their snobbish companions from home. All of a sudden the wife "felt a stab of cold uncertainty, as if she herself did not know what she meant, did not know what she had meant, or might have meant." As no one else in the car would talk to the Indian, all of the pressure was left to her and she was furious at them for that. This is the point of the story in which the reader dislikes the couple the most because not only has the narrator made them out to be extremely condescending, but this is also exaggerated by the Indian's subservience. Again and again the Indian thanked them as they drove him home. It was evident that they wanted him to be left off as soon as possible, not because they had some place to be, but because their friends did not approve of hauling around some Indian and his dead fish.

Offering a clear line of argument and a perceptive literary analysis, the paper explores the behaviors and practices that constitute and reinforce the marginalization of the fisherman in the story. Mary supplies direct quotes from the text to support her point that the Anglos feel a conflict between their loyalties to their upper-class friends and their affection for the Indian. She elaborates thoroughly, elucidating how textual details prove, as she states in the subsequent paragraph, that the couple "were temporarily freed from the social conventions of middle class social life while on their holiday." Using details and elaboration to support that thesis, Mary earned the highest grade in class with this paper, a *B+*.

Like Mary, Rick, too, focused on the construction of the fisherman as the Other. He dutifully began the paper the night after it was assigned. He even wrote in response to both prompts, intending to ask his teacher to critique his work, hoping to better understand her expectations and to garner a good grade on the paper. Stymied by scheduling conflicts, he was unable to meet Lillian, although he did confer with her by phone. He then revised, asking both his former rhetoric teacher and his mother, an elementary teacher with a strong background in English, to comment on his paper. Both gave it a "thumbs up," as Rick said. Feeling fairly confident about the paper he submitted, Rick assured me there was "plenty" of evidence available to support his thesis. A representative sample of the paper, written about "The Catch" in response to the second prompt, follows. Here too, Rick, like Mary, focuses on the treatment of the Indian by the Anglos:

> The couple is on the coastline in a hotel room enjoying their time off when they meet the old Indian. It may be the old lady next door, or, as they compare it in the story, to a stray dog. It's just that something or someone that sticks in your mind when thinking about a certain time or place. A vivid memory. That was what the old Indian was to be for this couple. He was a nice old man whom they met on the beach and promised to take a picture of, if and when they caught a big fish. I could see my parents doing the same. It's just consideration mixed in with leisure. The couple kind of views the old Indian as you view your grandpa. They think he is a nice old guy, but they just don't want to be bothered by him. It's a vacation. Besides, he isn't the cleanest person they've met and . . . he's an Indian.

In this excerpt Rick explores the discriminatory attitudes and practices of the Anglos toward the fisherman. We can understand how Rick's contribution might be perfectly appropriate for the classroom discussion, meandering as it does through textual and personal vignettes. Unlike Mary, Rick does not use direct quotes from the text. Attempting to build an "envisionment" (Langer 1990, 232), an understanding of his reading experience, Rick filters the text through his knowledge of the world. Creating a nexus shaped by "his parents doing the same" as the story characters, he attempts to build an analogy. Rick, searching for effective strategies, transfers classroom ways of talking to paper.

Unlike Mary, Rick claims that "it wasn't hard to find evidence from the story," although, as this excerpt reveals, that textual "evidence" does not appear in the paper. Ironically, his practices offer a counterpoint to his own self-description of what "the big paper assignments" entail: "We're supposed to back up the point with facts we get from the story." Despite Rick's successes in his former English classes, and his hard work, he received a *D* for this paper.

As a "formal" paper, a "formal" argument, we can see the teacher's rationale in assigning a low grade for this work. The argument is unclear, the paragraph does not seem anchored to any larger purpose; furthermore, textual support and analysis are absent. However, Lillian's evaluation came as a total surprise to Rick, the recipient of *A*s in the required prerequisite rhetoric series and in his high school college-preparation courses. Because he had never experienced writing "problems" before, he was, he confided, mystified by "what exactly she wants."

Nevertheless, Rick was determined to do better on the second paper, one that encouraged students to "explore the treatment of community by focusing on one particular aspect of it." This invitation urged students to "develop your own thesis" and stressed "the use of specific examples." The handout offered a menu of options (i.e., the relationship between individuals and community, gender roles in the community), enabling students to focus their discussions. Rick spent many hours in conference with Lillian as he prepared, drafted, and revised his next paper. While Mary's second grade jumped from a *B+* to an *A*, Rick's work remained lodged at the *D* level. His paper did exhibit a three-point thesis statement; however, that thesis defined the term *community* rather than how communities functioned in specific texts ("the roles that members played, how those members work together, and the unspecified feeling of reliance on one another"). Lillian's comments to these students in response to those second papers suggested their respective positions in this community. Lillian wrote to Mary that her "selection and integration of textual evidence is smoother and more thoughtful than ever." To Rick she wrote, "You continue to have very serious trouble here isolating a clear and distinct thesis and supporting it through close analysis of the works." Rick's persistent efforts to become a successful member of this community were stymied by his efforts to formulate a thesis and to provide textual evidence, strategies that Mary demonstrated elegantly. As students who received *A*s in previous English classes, as students who were versatile in using what they called "the formula," a variation of the five-paragraph theme, Rick as well as Mary should have been able to write a thesis/support paper. Yet Mary excelled while Rick floundered.

Why did Mary's efforts result in "success" on the formal papers while Rick's led him to the brink of "failure?" Perhaps as we examine writing in relation to talking about literature, we can begin to locate the competing pedagogical, institutional, and disciplinary forces that gave rise to and shaped these acts of reading, writing, and speaking.

"One Stand" vs. "So Many Different Ideas": "Good" Papers vs. "Good" Learners

Discussions were, as Rick said, "pretty open," frequently causing many students, including Rick and Mary, to alter positions, to resist definitive stances on texts, and to find themselves immersed in ambiguity. Mary illuminated the relationship between discussion and the production of the formal papers.

> A lot of people were having problems because they got so confused within the class discussions—so many different ideas were coming up. People were becoming frustrated. So maybe that's part of it: There's a lot of different ideas bouncing around out there. Maybe it can be helpful, or it can hurt you. . . . You can take a lot of different stands a lot of times. You can present your argument a lot of different ways.

Emphasizing that "you can take a lot of different stands," Mary nonetheless confides, "Sometimes I like to have just one stand on it—sometimes that's easier."

While Rick and Mary agreed that the multiplicity tapped in discussions was valuable, they disagreed on the contributions that those discussions made to writing the formal papers. Mary explained, "The way we talk in class is that if you have something to say you'll bring it up, and usually you provide proof of it in the text." It is the assertion with textual support format, intrinsic to academic discourse, that Mary focuses on, a form conducive to taking "one stand."

Rick, however, valued other facets of discussion: "I'm learning to respect people and things that I didn't think about before. I'm gaining a sensitivity." Rick, too, insisted that the voices of community members not only influenced him, but caused him to change his mind: "In my case a lot of times I wish I could rewrite some of my analysis. . . . I even said this and that in my paper, and then by the end of class I wish I could have said something else." Chiding himself for his "indecisiveness," he lamented, "I don't know—sometimes I leave discussions with bigger questions than I had when I got in there." What is striking about these comments is that Rick stresses knowledge about society over knowledge about textual elements: It is learning about "difference" and asking "bigger questions" that he takes from discussions—traces of which can be found in his papers. Mary, however, concentrates on polishing strategies for winning arguments: "Having one stand . . . it's easier." While Rick, a curious and committed student, emphasizes the "open" discussions and the ambivalences that arise from the "bigger questions," Mary, a "good" writer, reminds us that those are the very qualities that "can be helpful, or it can hurt you."

While we can, of course, argue that Rick has not successfully mastered the conventions of writing the formal paper about literature, we can also argue that this particular form of academic discourse foreclosed on the possibilities and ambiguities that discussion had rendered salient. Assessing issues cultural and personal, exploring meanings antithetical and ambivalent—these displays, infusing and enriching "the meaning" of oral discussion, were, ultimately, inappropriate elements of the formal written work. Because those papers provided the only graded work in the course and constituted the main source for semester grades, the student's ability to cull appropriate elements from discussion was intrinsic to academic success. Mary learned to extract from the multiplicity the assertion-support strategy and the use of text for evidence as Rick garnered the "extra-textual" elements. Juxtaposing their experiences, then, we can gauge "success" in relation to their divergent ways of taking from discussions and texts.

Furthermore, if we situate Rick's writing "difficulties" against an institutional backdrop, we gain new insights into this "problem." Rick understood that part of his dislocation sprung from his reliance on a five-paragraph theme format, landing him *A*'s in his prior classes and *D*'s in Lillian's class. But Rick's incongruous evaluations might also be seen as the products of an institutional fissure. Mary explained that the prerequisite rhetoric series focused not on writing about texts, but on writing about experience. While some rhetoric teachers did use text as a catalyst for discussion and writing, the course was not designed to teach students how to effectively

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build an argument about literature. As another case study teacher, who had taught in both the rhetoric and literature departments, described it, writing about literature was the *unwanted stepchild* in both the rhetoric and literature program areas. As he explained it, rhetoric instructors considered writing about literature to be the province of the literature class. Literature teachers, however, assumed that students would be able to demonstrate the appropriate composing skills as occasions in literature class demanded. As a consequence, neither program area offered a focus on the production of formal written literary analysis; neither offered a site for honing the skills involved in developing and supporting arguments about literary texts with text.

It was within these discursive chasms—between rhetoric and literature, between speaking and writing—that several ironies were born. First of all, because the production of the formal papers was situated within classroom contexts that proved conducive to student interaction and engagement, students generated a multitude of positions on texts, selves, and cultures. Writing formal papers that featured a single thesis with textual support then became the locus of disjunction and contradiction: multiplicity was to be "contained" and "subordinated" to the thesis in the formal papers. This offered a contrast to the display of dissensus, false starts, and entrances into ambiguity that were featured in discussions and journals. We might argue, then, that because Lillian and her students sought to generate multiple "ways of knowing" in oral discussions—rather than to "contain" that plentitude by synthesizing ideas into a thesis, as they did in writing—there was not a one-to-one correspondence between the multiplicities of discussion and writing. Because discussion speakers used the assertion/support strategy in combination with other ways of knowing, the range of practices displayed in discussion *exceeded* that spectrum of strategies used in writing the formal papers.

Second, because Lillian's students were encouraged to view discussion as a precursor and "model" for writing, just as students did in the college literature classroom Anne Herrington studied, Rick failed to understand that multiplicity entailed a variety of discussion strategies, only some of which enabled successful written arguments. It might be argued, then, that as the discussion shifted from oral and informal to formal and written, one version of multiplicity was simultaneously and inadvertently co-opted by another.

It was in this pedagogical "unconscious" that Lillian attempted to meet the institutional guidelines for the course, practices regulated by the discipline and sanctioned by the academy—the production of "normal" and "formal" papers featuring a single argument and a text-centered literary analysis. But in so doing, she inadvertently foisted on students a particular discursive practice that stood in counterpoint to her intentions to acknowledge and respect difference. Yet as a dedicated teacher, compelled to comply with departmental guidelines that mandated those formal papers, she also valued this mode of discourse as a privileged form of meaning and a primary source of grading.

Lillian, the conscientious teacher, insisted on the importance of the formal arguments about literature. Likewise, Rick, the committed student, refused to believe that writing academic discourse was beyond the scope of his abilities. "I'll never say die, even if there's only one class left." In actuality there were no classes left when Rick scored a "good" grade on one of his papers, a *B+* on the final. He finally mastered the strategies involved in creating a thesis/textual support formal paper. Yet, in managing this feat, his last and most "successful" writing revealed new absences: he surrendered the voice of exploration and relinquished the false starts; he refused the charting of his own ambivalences and refrained from the disclosing of personal and cultural histories; and, finally, he resisted the temptation to imprint "the meaning" of textual designs on cultural grids. We might, then, in light of these changes, view Rick's "problem" as the display of "excess" rather than as a portrait of "deficit," the offshoot of participation in this community rather than a byproduct of a lack of training or commitment.

Given the centrality of the formal literary analysis within and across the three classrooms, we can understand Lillian's emphasis on this form of discourse, her persistent efforts to promote access to yet another "way of knowing" texts. And with Lillian I endorse the argument about literature as a valid form of inquiry that may, as Nystrand (1991, 267) suggests, promote engagement with literature. But, nonetheless, I wonder how we might widen its scope to embrace the multiplicity exhibited in Lillian's discussions. This legacy from New Criticism—reinforcing rather than challenging text-centered instructional practices and ignoring rather than accommodating the material, cultural and linguistic diversities of actual readers—obscured the multiple and powerful ways of knowing that Lillian's discussions revealed. If, as Lillian suggested, reading as a student meant speaking in a body marked by gender, race, class, and other markers of difference, then writing as an academic ought to entail no less (Culler 1982, Flynn 1988).

As we collectively consider the implications of widening our repertoire of literatures and creating appropriate pedagogical frameworks, we might, with Lillian's help, reap the benefits of invoking plural responses to texts—inviting the restless and recursive interrogation of text, culture, and selves; the resistance to closure in the face of competing and often contradictory perspectives; and the recuperation of exploratory, partial, and unfolding understandings of readers. However, as Rick's experience suggests, these features of discussion must hold currency in student writing and evaluation as well.

It was in consideration of Rick's struggles that Lillian has attempted to rethink her teaching practices, resisting easy answers and simple solutions. While she acknowledges that "simply" revising her invitations to write in response to literature might be useful for her students, she cautions that simple solutions obscure difficult issues. As she says in response to this chapter,

> I still struggle with the tensions described by this analysis of my teaching. I feel responsible for encouraging my students to understand the social construction of difference—even when doing so, as inevitably it must, raises more questions than answers. At the same time, I want to equip them with the critical thinking and writing skills that will enable them to survive and thrive in institutions that demand linearity and a consciousness not so entirely divided it can't be engaged in conventional forms of discussion and debate.
>
> I hope that I am more honest about this tension with my students: that is, I make clear that while I encourage exploration and the sifting of ambiguous and often irreconcilable differences, institutionally sanctioned discourse demands a consciousness of convention, even and perhaps especially, in the overturning of it. I also offer students more avenues—in terms of "grades"—for pursuing these competing but complementary skills than I did in this instance. Despite these changes, the tension portrayed in this essay, remains significant for me. How can I as a teacher, I wonder, both prepare my students for the challenges of a world which demands linearity and univocality in communication while encouraging them to realize, accept, and perhaps even celebrate the local nature of all subjectivities, including, of course, their own?

Lillian, Mary, and Rick enable and invite us to investigate our speaking and writing practices as we interrogate our pedagogical, institutional, and disciplinary "silences" (Macherey 1978, 84–9). Lillian reminds us that within such silences the contradictions and complexities of teaching texts by and about "the Other" resound, enabling us to "acknowledge," as the epigraph suggests, "the ways in which feminism is both outside the discourse of the fathers and, simultaneously, inscribed in Western logocentrism, patriarchal rationality, and imperialistic practices" (86). It is moving within as she presses against the limits of academic discourse that Lillian enables us to concurrently envision new possibilities for literature instruction as we consider their limits and our responsibilities to students. Furthermore, she teaches us this as we extend "the meaning" of contemporary literary education, rendering it a potent force in changing social practices as it enriches classroom dynamics.

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12 Writing Portfolios in the Multicultural Literature Class

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The teaching of a new canon of U.S. literature is enriched through the use of writing portfolios which give students ownership of their own learning. In genuinely collaborative efforts, students share their developing responses to a wide variety of literary works. Portfolio assignments become lessons in how to choose and develop topics, how to decide what is worth discussing and why, and how to present one's commentary to a variety of audiences. The flexibility and demands of the portfolio approach encourage students not only to explore multicultural works but also to consider how and why texts come to be privileged as canons take shape. In the "heady" job as boss of one's own portfolio, each student is empowered to make and defend decisions about what good literature is and why it matters. Ownership means learning to care about, and having a say in, answering questions too often kept out of class discussion.

Research on the portfolio-based writing course has demonstrated positive benefits for students and instructors alike (Yancey 1992; Belanoff and Dickson 1991). Extending portfolio pedagogy to the multicultural literature course invites students to enter into ongoing conversations about how aesthetic values are decided and literary canons are reshaped. Portfolios in the writing class create opportunities for true exploratory drafting and meaningful revision; encourage critical thinking; and provide alternatives to standardized assessment. As students take ownership of every stage of their work, they also learn new ways to relate to each other in shared tasks, consultation, and peer editing. Emphasis on final products and grades is diminished in favor of commitment to brainstorming and revision, self-assessment, and collaborative learning. In Irwin Weiser's terms, the emphasis is "positive and motivational" with the chief aim "to encourage students to help one another demonstrate the best writing they are capable of doing" (91). This collaborative dimension of portfolios is similar to many of the efforts in business writing or the activities in which college faculty engage while writing proposals for external research funding. Instead of the solitary learner who makes plans, follows models, and gets stuck or reaches breakthroughs in isolation, the portfolio author participates in a community of writers, readers, editors, and consultants—all of whom contribute to an evolution of values, judgments, and shared accomplishments.

The multicultural literature class adopts from portfolio-based writing courses an emphasis on process, student empowerment, and collaborative efforts. The opportunity to explore drafts that might even go nowhere encourages literature students to experiment with different kinds of reading. Revision that is more than correction further rewards exploration and involves students in self-reflective critical thinking. Ownership of one's portfolio means a commitment to exploring the basic questions of a literature course: What is literature? How do we arrive together at standards of judgment? Who decides what is read and what isn't? And how will the emphasis on multiculturalism reshape our definitions of writing? Empowerment affects not only reading and critiquing literature, but the way we all talk *and listen* to each other in and out of class as well as the ways in which we define our own roles as students, teachers, and shapers of a living culture. Ultimately this collaborative process redefines literature as a social activity in which authors, critics, teachers, and students in literature courses are engaged in crucial conversation about who we are and where we are going together. The multicultural dimensions of these conversations validate what Raymond Williams calls the *emergent* alongside the *dominant* and *residual* ways a culture defines itself.

The use of portfolios in writing classes is what Kathleen Blake Yancey has called a "grassroots phenomenon" where participation is voluntary and where teachers design and maintain control over projects tailored for specific needs (107). Thus, the portfolio-centered multicultural literature class calls for assignments and assessment suited to variations in instructors and students. This paper offers one type of portfolio assignment used in a U.S. literature survey course. My aim throughout is to be exemplary, not prescriptive.

The Portfolio Assignment

Several conditions are built into my sample assignment which makes this literature-course portfolio more than a collection of diverse writings. Each student is asked to create what is essentially a short book of commentary on U.S. literature. There is time to explore a range of topics, to brainstorm, and to write several drafts in consultation with each other and with me. Each student decides on an emphasis as well as a target audience. Essays may develop independently of each other or on a focused topic, and the unity of the collection often emerges while works are in progress. The delicate balance between process and product is maintained when students begin projects early in the semester and realize that there is time and support for changing their minds, that discussion of portfolio progress is welcome in class as well as in conferences, and that they are fully capable of helping and getting help from each other. I intervene at every stage of their work, thinking of myself as a consulting editor and playing the role of audience for them as they learn to adapt and create audiences in an ongoing conversation about literature. Part of this intervention includes helping students understand the ways in which—in Walter Ong's terms—they will fictionalize their own audience along the way.

While flexibility in reading and writing about literature is paramount in this assignment, a clear idea of acceptable outcomes enables students to take ownership of the work at every stage. The assignment calls for a unified collection of thirty to thirty-five pages, following the model of a short book of critiques and commentary on U.S. literature. Generally, each collection is divided into six or seven selections of varying lengths, sometimes organized into subsections. In the brainstorming stages of writing, students are urged to explore a variety of topics and formats until they are ready to focus. In the final product, each portfolio collection includes a title page, table of contents, preface, dedication and acknowledgements, and optional artwork, charts, diagrams, or video and audio accompaniment.

The portfolio assignment aims for relaxed formality. The following shows one way to introduce the guidelines on a syllabus:

> Consider your portfolio to be a short book collecting your responses to the literature—done in a short period of time but with a lot of support from your friends. You will be asked to write in class and out of class on literature from our text and beyond (of your choice). The idea is to create a more or less unified collection of your responses to share with the rest of us (two copies due in class on publication date: ___________)
>
> Here are some requirements and suggestions. Aim for about 30-35 pages. Capture what you are expressing in a title (and title page). Include a Table of Contents and a Preface in which you talk to your readers in a way that prepares them for what's coming and helps them read better. Target to an audience, of course.

> (Don't forget dedications or thanks to colleagues, people you interviewed, the many who help along the way.) Most (let's say 2/3) of your portfolio must be essay-type responses to the literature in or clearly suggested by our syllabus.
>
> Some further suggestions: You might want to publish selections from your journal response to the literature, excerpts from letters you have written to others about your reading, even your own interesting marginalia. You might create "interviews" between writers or characters in the literature, comparisons between the literature and other art forms or media, interviews with living U.S. writers, reviews of plays or films that you attend during the course (or literary videos you rent). You might also have a go at poetry, fiction, or drama of your own. Innovation is welcome.

While the assignment should hold to these or other requirements, the intent is to open up not only the types of literature studied but the ways students learn to write about the works they read. The typical portfolio is about thirty pages long and is formatted as a short book. Titles and cover designs vary but are mostly simple and direct: *Harlem Renaissance Poets, Journals by American Women, Beat Writers in America, Dreamers in Literature, American Autobiographies: Past and Present.* A short preface comments on how and why the collection was written and provides a brief map of its organization. Often, acknowledgements are included. A table of contents lists the six to eight consecutive chapters or loosely connected selections, though portfolios can be anything from one extended essay to a compilation of very short pieces. Many students include one or two stories or poems of their own as they seem to fit. I've had students writing about "road literature" take short road trips and include their own stab at the genre. Often there is an afterword where authors go behind the scenes and explore what they learned writing the collection or suggest what they and their readers might do next. Some students preparing to be teachers include suggestions on how they might teach, perform, or otherwise share the literature further in their careers.

Subject matter varies with the interests and goals of the students in each class. Many portfolio writers choose to concentrate on the new canon. Focus and breadth combine when students create annotated anthologies of Native American or Hispanic poetry or African American literature. Students select the works and provide introductions, connecting links, and suggestions for further reading and discussion. Studies of one author become less frequent when I suggest that such works are already available and that a broader scope allows more flexibility and meets better the aims of the course to find patterns and connections. Thematic emphases cut across the new and old canons as in studies called *American Protest Fiction*, *The American Dream Revisited*, or *A Sense of Place in Midwestern Writers from Sherwood Anderson to Gwendolyn Brooks*.

Portfolios also encourage students to begin projects based on what they already know something about. Broadcasting majors might explore literature and the media with an emphasis on how stories or plays are adapted for film and video. The pay-off is an inside-out look at how literary texts work. Students of philosophy, psychology, or religion might choose a thematic approach and collect four or five commentaries on selected works. Personal experiences can be a great asset in the writing as well. Motorcyclists could be directed to *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and work their way into classics of the American highway from Whitman to Kerouac. One student I remember came to study U.S. autobiographies through a close reading of his grandfather's and father's manuscripts and also made at least a brief foray into starting his own. The result was both a critical study and a living example of American autobiographies old and new. Whatever subject or approach students develop in portfolios, I emphasize that the projects can be experimental and flexible, that dead ends are still valuable, and that even the most loosely connected organization (*The Collected Essays of ______*) is workable.

Because the portfolio assignment is new and can be intimidating at first, instructor intervention is crucial earlier in the process. No later than the fourth week of class, I ask students for a progress report and schedule a brief conference to discuss possibilities they suggest. A checklist like the one in Figure 1 will keep this "prospectus" report relaxed yet focused.

The multicultural literature portfolio enables students to make meaningful connections between the way they read literature and the values they hold in their own family lives or the way they relate to friends. Autobiography, for example, is a major form of U.S. literature, overlapping with essay, travel writing, and political commentary. While reading Henry Adams, Malcolm X, Richard Rodriguez, or Maya Angelou, students are often enticed to try their own hand at some autobiographical writing. At the same time, they may become interested in interviewing parents and grandparents or even finding old journals in the attic or talking to the aunt who has done some tracing of roots. Surprisingly, they find, literature is a part of daily life today—as was the case when the anthologized stuff was first composed, before it became encased in literature texts. Students may even get into serious debates about whether some rock

Name

A portfolio proposal is due:
Please use this sheet.

Direct Approach

☐ 1. Here's what I have in mind right now. See other side for brief summary, tentative table of contents and working title, questions I'll ask, people I intend to reach.

Less Direct

☐ 2. Some possibilities I'm exploring:

☐ 3. Further details–list of what I've written so far about the literature assigned (or related material) from the first few weeks:

Describe

What I want to accomplish

Use other side as needed.

The audience I want to reach

Outside materials needed

I'd like to try something different:

☐ Questions I have about all this:

☐ I'd like an appointment to talk about this soon.

Figure 1. Portfolio proposal form.

song lyrics are poetry, whether TV soap operas resemble "serious" serialized fiction of earlier times, and the extent to which film is a contemporary form of literature. In short, the portfolio approach invites students into recent conversations about the ancient battles between popular and elitist art, what John Fiske refers to as evasions and manipulations of conventions.

Final drafts of these literature course portfolios are due at least one week before the end of the term on a day designated as "publication day," when students become the audience for each other and celebrate all the efforts put forth. While students have read drafts for each other along the way, generally there is time to share materials with only a handful of readers. On publication day, everyone in the course gets a chance to see and enjoy everyone else's work. Although formats for publication and sharing can vary widely, it is crucial to decide on a system and make it clear why the process is important. For example, in a publication party, the classroom becomes a bookstore where each student is the literary agent for another's portfolio. Each agent introduces a new publication to the audience and explains its strengths and special features. Without having to toot their own horns, students are able to enjoy and be proud of the strongest features of their own work. This exercise also invites the whole class to reconsider the question of audience as everyone has an opportunity to become acquainted with each new publication and decide whether it is for them or someone else. While this event may take on the trappings of marketing strategy, the goal is to provide a variety of ways of looking at what literature is and why people write in response to it. As a follow up, students can be asked to select one or more portfolios which they might review for selected publications. This process will raise additional questions of who reads reviews and why and what place literature, critical commentary, and literary reviews might continue to have in their lives beyond the "lit" class.

The short-book writing portfolio in the literature classroom empowers students, reshapes the classroom environment, and alters the relationship between instructors and students. In several ways, students as authors take ownership of their own learning. Project design is exciting. Experimenting with a table of contents opens up possibilities. Seeking advice from other students clarifies the definition of one's own goals. Taking a stand on what they like and don't like involves students in questions about literary taste, judgment, and values. It is egotistical in the best sense for students to create their own titles and to tell readers in a preface how they want their collection to be read based on their own authorial and editorial decisions. Small-group discussions about portfolios during class meetings are task oriented and meaningful. Students listen to each other because they need advice about how they sound, whether they are thorough and interesting, and how they could do better. Discussion of writing about literature is also discussion about literature, but in small-group settings where the students often choose, defend, question, and help each other about what is discussed. While instructors do give up some of their function as the "boss," collegiality and respect accompany the new collaborative efforts.

In collaborating on portfolio activities, students offer each other encouragement, advice, and criticism. They provide leads on further reading and share library resources. Because their shared tasks are of their own choosing, the motivation to cooperate is genuine. Unlike in some classroom group exercises which merely mask work that remains individualistic, when students work as each other's consultants they come to depend on each other for results. Assignments are not canned in group discussions where ownership of one's own work takes precedence over giving teachers and textbooks what they ask for. One good measure of real collaboration is the number of sincere expressions of thanks to each other—with specifics—in the acknowledgements section of the preface.

A portfolio approach to the multicultural literature course makes writing central to all the work assigned. Book proposals are discussed early so students are encouraged to brainstorm on a variety of writing projects before deciding on a focus. One way to encourage daily exploration on paper is to prepare blank calendars covering a few weeks at a time with large empty daily boxes which invite comments and questions from each student. A typical calendar for one-third of a semester would reproduce five weeks on a Monday–Wednesday–Friday schedule (see Figure 2).

The point is that the students and I communicate daily in writing. One day I might say, "Write in the box one major question you are left with as class ends," or I may ask, "Do women writers emphasize perspectives that are different from the male writers you have read?" Or "What did you really think of the poetry we talked about today?" There is not much space in the small boxes, but I hear from everyone at every class period, and I can respond on sticky notes. Students may also elaborate on the other side of the page

M	W	F

Figure 2. Five-week calendar.

(and they do!). There's an advantage in keeping it brief because the students and I can keep up in our regular dialogue. Comments also lead to good conferences. Or I can really loosen up and say, "Send me a message or ask the questions you didn't want to bring before the class spotlight." Or, "Let's use each box as a fan-o-gram and send each other signals." The results can be wonderful: dialogue with the student who might not otherwise talk much or at all, outlandishly brilliant questions, or mundane remarks that develop into genuine insights.

The content of these boxes often sets an agenda for discussion, follows up on material when time tends to run out, or draws attention to snags in the portfolio work. Instructors and students can tell each other about related books and films, shout at each other (politely) on paper, and break down a few of the silence barriers. Much in the way "exit slips" are used in writing-centered content courses in any field, the daily calendar dialogue is a way of connecting the end of one class with the beginning of the next, a tool for bringing the underparticipant out into discussion, and a daily opportunity to make the traditional literature class more diverse in a variety of ways. For example, on a day when students watched a university-produced videotape of works by Etheridge Knight and Mari Evans, I asked why they thought performance was important to the enjoyment of poems. I used their responses the next day to segue into works by Gwendolyn Brooks. We started where the students wanted to be and led each other along to new insights. On another occasion the dialogues led to comparison of Native American ghost dance songs, blues lyrics, and the rebelliousness of Huck Finn. Underparticipants will revel in contributions they might never offer when they are in the spotlight. (After the first five-week grid is filled, two more follow, and the process isn't the worst way to keep both attendance and a record of who is thinking about what from day to day.)

Determining Literary Value

What happens to the old canons of literature in a class that introduces a new canon? Suddenly, the old works may not be as sacred, but neither are they as threatening or out of reach. Seeing value in new faces lessens appreciation for classic authors *only* if we think of literature as being contained in the pages of anthologies where each new entry means one of the tried-and-true might be displaced. But students writing portfolios don't quite see it that way. For students enjoying new stories or poetry for the first time, the music and artistry can be found in every culture without diminishing the worth of any other. There is room for portfolios on women writers of the nineteenth century and the Harlem Renaissance and the poetry of Joy Harjo as well as the autobiographical writings of Ben Franklin or Hemingway. Locking horns over which authors are worthy of discussion is a learned response which may be best postponed—perhaps indefinitely.

At the same time, standards of taste remain in a big way and can be discussed as meaningful disagreements based on agreed-upon criteria rather than being imposed by fiat or mere authority. Consider what happens if you begin the course asking students to name the three best works of U.S. literature. While initial responses tend to follow patterns of judgment taught in earlier courses, most students are pleased to be asked and surprised that their opinions seem to count. When you add questions about why they have reached their decisions, some startling observations can be made. Those choosing classics like *Huck Finn* or *The Scarlet Letter* often have the least to offer in backing up their judgments. That's not surprising, of course, when someone is merely repeating the canon, but it should be disappointing to find people having the least to say about what are purportedly the best works. At the same time, when students offer *The Color Purple* as a favorite, they have reasons which give them ownership of their judgment as well as some insight into how a canon gets formed in the first place. Alongside some discussion of the comings and goings of reputations, explorations and justifications of individual taste offer clues about how a culture decides its values and why.

Students owning their own portfolios means raising a variety of questions about "serious" literature that conventional paper assignments tend to ignore. The stature and sanctity of what is considered to be the acceptable paper topic sets bounds on not only what students write about but what they discuss with each other. Tracing themes, character development, or clusters of symbols is considered intrinsically valuable with little exploration of how actual readers might or might not care about issues the teacher or the texts choose. That's not all bad, of course, because it is a class of instruction guided by experienced readers who teach valuable skills. Given the benefits of an instructor's guidance, however, there is still so much more to gain when the students make decisions that give them a stake in the outcome of the whole delicate process. Not surprisingly, the decisions these empowered class members make are often more in line with the way literature actually makes its way into and out of popular taste and sanctioned canons than with the way we shape curricula.

The portfolio-based writing class invites questions, for example, about current market, and popularity as well as enduring the tests of time. Students choosing to write book reviews ask who reads book reviews, and that leads to the task of becoming competent enough to hold the attention of readers. If students in the class decide to write about plays or novels, they usually have some motivation for producing a short book that someone will actually want to read. If the audience must be more than the captive teacher, there has to be a selling point to the project. Who cares about this? Why will they seek out or even buy my book? What skill do I bring as commentator that my readers will come to trust, respect, and enjoy? That's ownership of material, and the commitment will translate into everything a literature class is about: more detailed and patient reading, meaningful discussion, debate when there's conflict, and at least the start of consideration about how literature might have value for their lives beyond one course.

Owning one's work means asking questions that challenge what students have been taught is proper in the conventional literature course. On their own and in small groups, these novice commentators are going to ask how a particular work got to be popular in the first place or why something is considered "great" when most people don't even seem to enjoy it. Even students not interested in literary criticism will be puzzled about how disagreements in taste come and go, how decisions are made about what is good and what isn't, and who holds the power to decide and why. Portfolio assignments with this kind of latitude require teachers who trust themselves and their students enough to patiently explore such questions. In the process, many of the most conventional literature topics are still "covered" but in a way that gives students a stake in finding answers for themselves.

Redefining "Coverage"

As in any pedagogical strategy, the use of portfolios to teach a new canon has some rough edges, drawbacks, and outright weaknesses. Portfolios focus and energize a student's work but they can detract from the breadth and "coverage" required in a survey. Consider some of the problems. The new canons are larger and require great range.

Big chunks of reading with discussion might also call for factual quizzes to keep the class together and help discussions. Portfolios can complement conventional exams—whether essay or identification of quotations, characters, or themes. Exam questions, therefore, provide links between the focus of the portfolios and the broader emphasis of the survey course. For example, students can be asked to identify major similarities or differences between authors, subjects, themes, or cultural symbols emphasized in their own portfolio projects and in selected works by protest writers of the 1930s, Jazz Age authors, or the literature between the wars. In the process of working toward synthesis, coverage of material is redefined to include not only recall and comparison but also analysis of how the more focused study of portfolio material provides insights into the general features of literature and culture. The purpose of a survey course is altered to move away from chronology or smorgasbord and toward greater depth. Students might not be exposed to as much material in this approach, but that loss has to be weighed against the likelihood that they are doing a better job with what they have chosen to do and that with guidance their choices have been representative.

What the portfolio approach loses in breadth, it might compensate for in opening the doors to new material often overlooked by even the most effective survey approach. The project focus lends itself particularly well, then, to courses in which the study of multicultural literature offers a new kind of breadth even as it encourages students to look beyond what there is generally time for. Instructors and students alike have to be comfortable letting go of the anxiety that something will be left out. Much has been left out for decades—which is exactly the point of redefining the canon. Students are now invited to participate in the dialogue about how "breadth" is to be redefined and how we are going to determine who must be included and why. Letting go also means trusting that the portfolio approach will empower students to want to read more when the course is over. For some teachers, portfolios may seem to detract from the importance of an historical analysis of literature. There is only so much time available in class or for course projects, and time spent on individual authors or focused questions can replace lecture or discussion about literary or philosophical patterns typical of the survey. Again this tension goes to the core of why we are teaching a new canon. As we become alert to ongoing battles over how to decide what to study, students are also becoming aware of how we create literary values in the process of defining them. While there may not be time, for example, to read many "frontier" writers, there may be greater attention to how the frontier came to be a defining characteristic of our culture or what Patricia Nelson Limerick has called "a preeminent case study in conquest and its consequences" (335). The greater depth of work for the portfolio—together with accompanying group discussions and critiques—will lead to analysis of who defined the frontier in certain ways and why as well as who benefits or suffers in the process. The same can be said for survey discussions of "the multicultural experience." Although some conventional breadth may be lost, another kind of breadth is gained by the sanctioning of multicultural authors long overlooked. In examining the multicultural experience, we are asking whose experiences we are talking about, whose definitions are to be valued and to what end. Perhaps, then, less breadth is lost in the portfolio approach than we fear as students are invited in on the pedagogical and political battles that are likely to ensue as *coverage* is redefined. In one additional way, *coverage* takes on new meaning. While students may be narrower in the scope of their own portfolios, by reading and reviewing a wide variety of each others' works, there is opportunity for breadth in their shared critiques as they come to know a little better what they like about literature and why.

Evaluation

In addition to trading breadth for depth and redefining what survey coverage ought to be, portfolios in the multicultural classroom raise questions about grading. It would seem that the very notion of grading portfolios runs contrary to students' ownership of their material and their opportunity to adapt their writing to different kinds of audiences. Ultimately, of course, the motivation for a project is the grade, and that in itself limits the prerogatives of ownership. And while fellow students and others are involved as consultant–readers, the instructor who assigns the grade is the audience that counts. Both of these limitations at the center of grading portfolios are real but manageable and require some changes in the lecturer and discussion-leader roles of survey-course instructors.

Grading does limit freedom of choice for the portfolio assignments, but those limits are also governed by time, resource limitations, and experience. Students will set further limits on each others' writing as they offer advice about what they think will be effective. I recommend that instructors intervene in the writing process often—through progress-report grades, for example—at several intermediate workshop dates as well as for the finished product. I do not ask students to assign grades to each other, but each person is responsible for bringing materials to workshop sessions *and* for being helpful to others. All these stages count (for points or a percentage of the final grade) as do efforts made on "discards" or on planned projects that didn't go anywhere themselves but helped a different final product to evolve. Portfolios bring a somewhat larger range of assessment to students than conventional grading.

Two additional areas of grading are both problematic and liberating. As students learn to identify the audiences who want and need to read their analyses of literature, instructors have the responsibility to play the roles of those audiences and to offer advice on how to be effective. It is quite possible, for example, that instructors A and B have very different personal tastes but can learn to be equally supportive consultant-readers who empower students to write collections of essays which they genuinely want to write. Just as journal referees decide the appropriateness and value of an article for the journal's readers, so also instructors make decisions based on the student's goals for a portfolio. Finally, this kind of consultation—along with an emphasis on process as well as product—calls for some tutorial or conference time built into the course. While much of this can take place during class sessions, there will be times when nothing but the one-on-one tutorial will be effective. Portfolio assessment may create problematic demands on time in very large courses. Group conferences and increased collaborative work during class time can make the process workable if not ideal in large classes.

In most literature courses teaching a new canon, portfolios as outlined here can be the major but not the only form of assessment. Of course, what is needed and what will work depend on the preparation and personality of each individual class, and syllabi unfortunately must be ready before we really know the students. With adaptation possible, I suggest making the portfolio about 50 percent of the final grade with about 20 percent of the evaluation based on class participation and contributions, and the remaining 30 percent a combination of tests, quizzes, calendar-box questions and answers, or journal responses to the literature. This kind of combination allows different learning styles to flourish and reduces anxiety about the project when it is first presented.

Portfolios involve students in the multicultural literature class in at least two additional ways. Because the portfolio assignment encourages multimedia components, the oral dimensions of ethnicity get a hearing. Audio tapes frequently accompany commentaries on African American and Latino works while videos might reproduce Native American dance literature, provide interviews with authors, or present documentary features extending beyond the printed page. It is well known that many publishers provide audio and videotape materials to accompany an author's work, and the portfolio format validates the student's attempts to respond to the literature in ways that supplement written critiques. Moreover, a video component of a portfolio raises the question of adapting literature to performance as well as initiating discussion of the literary dimensions of film and video.

Finally, portfolios entice students to try their own hand at writing poetry or stories. In at least a portion of their short books, students place their own autobiographical essays alongside Annie Dillard's or interspace their own poems with commentary on the prison poems of Etheridge Knight. The students' works are experimental in the best sense, a lesson in what Robert Scholes has described as coming to understand the power of texts from the inside out and Peter Washington has called "a shift in attention from interpretation to composition, from values to skills, from the preoccupation with meaning to the study of conventions" (176). Celebrating students' own writing in the literature class has been the goal for years of many composition teachers who also teach literature.

Being invited into the conversation of a community of writers is the most positive feature of what Michel Foucault means by learning to play the game or what David Bartholomae describes as a struggle for entrance into the realm of other—with all its pitfalls and power traps. For many students in the multicultural literature class, the portfolio is not so much Foucault's game as a long overdue validation of their own voice both in the recognition given to authors long neglected and in the opportunity to enjoin their own memories and imaginations to the expanding canon. Both the changing canon and the new ways of reading and writing about literature will bring doubts and anxieties for some students and instructors. As Nancy Welch has noted in her recent exploration of the "conversion model" of teaching, active and reflective learning are based on "doubting, debating, questioning, and revising." When convergence of differences replaces an attempt to convert others, the critical thinking which results comes to value "activity over acquiescence" and to see "resistance not as intolerance but as an opportunity for investigation, articulation, and learning" (400). Portfolios validate and provide opportunities for students' ownership of their own learning central to the study of multicultural literature.

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IV Negotiating Texts and Contexts

13 Teaching *China Men* as a Chinese

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> Scenario I: A Chinese walks into the classroom with *China Men* and a pile of syllabi. He stops at the desk in front of the classroom, puts the book and the syllabi on the desk, raises his head, and smiles at the whole class of white students. Since this is an evening class, he greets them with a very nice "Good Evening!" but nobody answers.

> Scenario II: In the middle of the class one week later, one student puts up her hand and asks, "Can you tell me the real implications of the word *ghost* because it has been used in many different ways in the book?" A second student poses another question: "How am I supposed to understand this book since there is not a single story line to follow?" A third student takes over: "Do the Chinese always curse by saying 'Your mother's cunt'?"

These two scenarios happened to me when I taught Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* in a course called "Literature of American Minorities" at the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. They illustrate several interesting aspects of the interactions among the students (midwestern, white, Protestant), the texts (in particular *China Men*), and me, the Chinese instructor. More important, they also clearly demonstrate the students' difficulties with, as well as resistance to, multicultural texts. In this essay, I will describe my perception of the students' feelings as they read *China Men*, analyze their three kinds of difficulties they had with the reading process, delineate what I did to aid them in overcoming these three barriers, and finally provide some general conclusions.

Besides *China Men*, we also read Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It was an introductory course in which we were supposed to touch on the literatures of the four largest minority groups in the United States. I chose these four books (two of which are novels while the other two are more difficult to classify), one from each group, because (1) I am personally more interested in prose than poetry; (2) I thought that most students would have an easier time reading prose; and (3) I believed that by reading one book the students would obtain a broader picture of the minority group than by reading a few poems or a couple of short stories.

China Men was the first book we read in the ten-week course. We spent four weeks on it. During the remaining six weeks, we spent two weeks each on the other three books. I designed the course this way for two purposes. First, I believed that I knew more about Kingston and *China Men* than about the other authors and texts so I felt I had greater authority and expertise, and, therefore, the confidence to teach the book well. Second, I wanted to use my teaching of *China Men* to give the students a model for approaching other multicultural texts. After listening to my lectures, participating in instructor-organized discussions for four weeks, and writing a paper on *China Men*, they were required to do some research, write a formal paper, and give a presentation on one of the other three books, combining their research findings and their own interpretations.

I designed two questionnaires to bracket my teaching of *China Men;* the first was given at the first class meeting and the second when we finished the book. The first questionnaire was designed to collect some general information about the students' knowledge of Chinese American literature, their attitudes toward the course, and their personal cross-cultural experiences, if any. These were the questions on the first questionnaire:

1. Have you read anything by Maxine Hong Kingston or other Chinese Americans? If yes, list the names of the writer(s) and/or the title(s).
2. Have you ever had a Chinese or Chinese American friend? If yes, please describe her/him.
3. If your answer to #2 is *no*, have you had any contact with Chinese or Chinese Americans?
4. What do you know about Chinese culture?
5. What is your perception of the Chinese or Chinese Americans?
6. Why are you taking this course?

The students' responses were in some ways quite unexpected but in some ways predictable. Of the forty students, about half answered *yes* to the first question. Most of these students had either heard of

The Woman Warrior or read it in another class. Some students had also heard about Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. None of the students had ever had a Chinese or Chinese American friend. Since Minnesota has fewer than 10,000 Chinese residents, this is hardly surprising. The majority of them had never had any kind of contact with any Chinese or Chinese Americans. Those students who wrote anything in their answers to number four said that "the Chinese had dragons, ate fortune cookies and tofu" and "the Chinese women's feet are bound." Most answers to number five are vague with something like, "They are just people like us" or "I treat everyone equally." And thirty-three students mentioned that they were taking the course because it helped them fulfill two requirements simultaneously: the requirement of an English class and the requirement in multicultural awareness.

Confronting such a class of white students, more or less coerced to take the course (and to read *China Men*) with practically no knowledge of any kind about the Chinese cultural matrix from which *China Men* originated, what should I do to help them? As a Chinese, so many things described in *China Men* were also a natural part of my life, though in a rather different way, that I had to think carefully about where to start the gigantic task of cultural introduction. I remember that when I was thirteen or fourteen, I used to read those ghost stories by Pu Songling (upon which "The Ghostmate" is based) with a flashlight inside the mosquito net on hot summer nights, and I recall how I fantasized about the dangerously pretty women who were really fox spirits. Often the first cockcrow from the front yard broke the spell and found me lost in the imagined world. But how could I transmit that kind of intimate experience to the students, give them some feel of the Chinese culture, and erect a ladder to help them climb to the top of this cultural dome?

Linguistic, Literary, and Cultural Difficulties

In reading *China Men*, the students had difficulty on three levels—linguistic, literary, and cultural. The linguistic problem lies in the students' puzzlement over familiar words which no longer make much sense in this cross-cultural text if they are still interpreted in the conventional meanings of their own culture. The literary barrier can be attributed to the students' lack of experience in reading literature in general, which makes them seem unprepared for *China Men*—a book blending several genres, without a main story line to follow. The cultural encumbrance resides in the students' disbelief in and resistance to the customs and conventions of another culture. The three questions listed in Scenario II are respectively representative of each of the three levels of difficulties.

The word *ghost* was not an unfamiliar one for the students. We discussed what images that word brought to mind for them; they mentioned Dracula, Jason, and vampires. Though the students could not articulate a clear and precise definition for *ghost*, they easily recognized the lady in "The Ghostmate" as something that they would call *ghost*. But when they came across the word *ghost* again in "The Brother in Vietnam," they hesitated. Why does MaMa call the usher at the theater "the usher ghost" (Kingston 264)? I wrote down on the blackboard the Chinese word for "ghost," *gui*, and explained that, owing to the oppression and exploitation of the Chinese by foreigners, starting early in the nineteenth century, they call all foreigners *gui* to express their hatred and distrust of anyone who is not Chinese. *Ghost* is really a neutralized word for MaMa to use; when Bak Goong refers to his boss in "Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains," he uses *demon*. Both *ghost* and *demon* are translations of *gui* but they tell a lot about the speaker's attitude.

Having answered a specific linguistic question, of course, does not mean that we have solved all the problems associated with the students' linguistic difficulty in reading multicultural texts. *China Men* does not have many words requiring such explication. What should we do about a text like Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, in which Spanish words appear on virtually every page? It is impossible for the instructor to explain every Spanish word. Introducing some historio-cultural background of the text and of that particular culture may help, but it cannot solve every linguistic problem. Here we seem to be trapped in an impasse if we intend to clarify linguistic problems for them. A good strategy is probably to set an example by dealing with some important ones and leave the rest for the students. And we should not forget to relate the explications of certain linguistic phenomena to the understanding of the whole text.

That was what I did with the names in *China Men*. In the first class, I wrote my name on the blackboard, in both English and Chinese, and explained how the romanization of my Chinese name has entirely changed its meaning. The students could see that my family name is, according to the English convention, now placed at the end and becomes the last unit, while in its original Chinese my family name is the first unit. This particular way of positioning one's family name before the given name illustrates the Chinese culture's emphasis on the family. Then I turned to the first page of *China*

Men and talked about why Kingston did not reverse the name of Tang Ao as I had mine. Tang was the name of the greatest dynasty in Chinese history; people living in Chinatowns today still call themselves Tang's people, and Chinatowns are called "Tang People's Street." Then I asked the students to guess which part of the name Tu Tzu-chun (from "On Mortality") is the family name. Most students guessed right: Tu is the family name.

Tang Ao and Tu Tzu-chun are still comparatively easy to handle as long as one can remember that the Chinese have a different way of arranging their given name and their family name. We come upon a rather tricky one in "The Making of More Americans," when Kingston presents her Aunt's Husband, I Fu. The students in my class simply took that as his real name. *I Fu* is, in fact, his title, meaning that he is the husband of the aunt (*I* is aunt and *Fu* husband). At this point I explained the Chinese custom of nomenclature in which one is always designated according to one's social status in a certain community. For instance, when I was in China, I could be called *teacher* by my students, *brother* by my peers, *uncle* by my friends' children, and *little Wang* by my superiors. My given name was used only on formal occasions.

It is unsurprising, therefore, to confront all these characters without names in *China Men*. For Kingston, as the Chinese custom dictates, they are simply Bak Goong (great-grandfather), Ah Goong (grandfather), and BaBa (father); their names are used only in legal documents to establish their citizenship. They are all her male ancestors; to call them by their given name would be rude and impermissible. And Kingston probably never discovered the given names of her great-grandfather and grandfather. Their given names are not important; it is their status as her ancestors that matters. To this day, I still don't know the names of my grandparents, and I did not know my parents' names until I started high school and had to fill out some forms myself. My parents did not think it important enough to inform me of their given names. As long as I could remember them as my parents, that was enough. Thus the students learned something about the Chinese custom of naming, solved some linguistic problems, and could understand *China Men* better.

The majority of the students had read very little serious literature, which partially explained their inability to deal with a book like *China Men*. On the literary level, they found it a lot easier to read and understand *Love Medicine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, both of which are fiction and have some kind of story to follow. *China Men* not only baffled them with the absence of a main story line but also confused them with its multiple, sometimes contrasting versions of the same story and its seemingly disorganized structure of six main chapters and twelve interchapters or intertexts. The students were intimidated by this structure and didn't know how to handle it. They asked, "What was Kingston trying to say?" That is indeed a tough question, as we all know, since great literature always defies a single uniform interpretation.

I decided, however, to analyze two aspects in the book to provide them with a starting point, a look at the book from one perspective. First, *China Men* is mainly based on the talkstories that Kingston heard in her childhood. Talkstorying is part and parcel of a long Chinese tradition of oral literature. Though there is a basic frame for every story, the talkstorier changes the details on each occasion to make the story fit the situation. As a result of these changes, we have different versions of the same story, and these different versions take on dissimilar, sometimes conflicting, nuances in meaning. The beginning of "The Ghostmate" clearly reveals Kingston's intention to render the indefiniteness of talkstories:

> Many times it has happened that a young man walks along a mountain road far from home. He may have passed the Imperial Examination . . . or failed. . . . Or he may not have been a student at all but a farmer at market overnight—or an artisan. (74)

The talkstorier can use any of these possibilities, depending on the audience for the story.

Even so, Kingston, as a conscious writer, certainly made her choice in selecting the materials. I told the students that, if they examined the book closely, they would discern that the deceptively random structure of the book has its inherent logic. "On Discovery" uses a fable to symbolize the early beginning of the Chinese immigration to America in search of the "Gold Mountain." "On Listening" presents the writer at rest after finishing her book because now she can "watch the young men who listen" to her stories (Kingston 1989, 308). Thus there is a purposeful frame to encircle all the stories in the book.

The book's structure has two other interesting characteristics. First, those intertexts whose titles are italicized in the table of contents are all about China or the Chineseness of the Chinese Americans, while the main chapters delineate the characters' struggles in America. Since there are only six main chapters, Kingston seems to suggest that the Chineseness dominates in and wraps over the Chinese Americans who were her male ancestors. Second, all the twelve intertexts deal with a recurrent theme of returning home from an attractive place, reflecting the Chinese Americans' internal debate about whether to return to China or remain in America.

The theme of returning home was the second literary aspect that I analyzed for the students, and this analysis was done in the light of Kingston's narrative strategy of telling different versions of the same story. To supplement this analysis, I contrasted the different conceptions of home in Chinese and American cultures by asking the students to read Cathy Song's poem, "Heaven," and Yi-Fu Tuan's article, "American Space, Chinese Place." Song claims that "It must be in the blood,/this notion of returning" (192) while Tuan believes that the Chinese are by nature more rooted in their home than the rootless Americans (163). For me personally, though I enjoy better living conditions here, I always feel like an outsider, barred from the American society. Do Kingston's characters really want to return to China? If so, why does Kingston have Great Uncle say, "'I've decided to stay in California. This is my home'" (184)? Refusing to return to China, he died without seeing his wife for the last time, a woman from whom he had been separated for more than thirty years. A heated discussion immediately followed my questions, and some students were able to relate it to their own experiences of missing home while away for a long period of time.

Of the students' three levels of difficulties, cultural encumbrance was probably the most difficult to overcome because any explanation about a culture in general terms seems futile and probably does more harm than good. Though I decided to introduce some Chinese cultural background that might aid their comprehension of the book, one question always remained: How *much* background information should I give them? Too little information might not be sufficient to shed any light, but our limited time certainly did not allow for comprehensive lectures on the Chinese literature and culture which are interwoven into the warp and woof of *China Men*. Take the very first chapter or intertext for an example. Entitled "On Discovery," the story in this chapter is adapted from the famous Chinese classic, *Flowers in the Mirror*, by Li Ruzhen (c. 1763–1830). Li himself was a stalwart advocate of women's rights and, for that reason, invented the Land of Women and imagined the sexual metamorphosis of a male into a female to protest the atrocities that Chinese feudal society inflicted upon women. As a Chinese classic, *Flowers in the Mirror* itself is worthy of a whole academic term of instruction and discussion on its own. Yet, Kingston, appropriating the classical story for her own purposes, makes so many changes that Joseph Lau warns the reader against trusting *China Men* as a work of scholarship because of its inaccuracies (47). Thus both connections and disconnections need to be pointed out.

Moreover, "On Discovery" is so rife with allusions to various Chinese customs and conventions concerning women that explaining all of them would take up at least a couple of class periods. And it is only two and a half pages long. There are also the other three obvious intertexts based on popular Chinese stories: "The Ghostmate" is modeled after Pu Songling's ghost stories; "On Mortality" is the retelling of the story of Du Zichun, a legendary figure; and "The Li Sao: An Elegy" narrates the life of Q Yuan, the Chinese Homer. To explain the tradition and the context embedded in all these intertexts alone would require a whole academic quarter's time, but to skip the explication of the original texts of these appropriations in *China Men* would certainly ignore the Chineseness of the book. Without understanding how Pu Songling's ghost stories were an integral part in the childhood of Chinese children, one could not comprehend the full implications of growing up among ghosts. Neither could one really perceive Kingston's urgent need to exorcise through her writing these haunting ghosts that were not only her past but have remained with her.

My contemplation led me to believe that it was simply impossible for me to cover everything related to the Chinese culture in the book. Therefore, I decided to focus on one chapter and hoped, with the discussion of that chapter, to generate some intimate feeling for the students. Since some students already mentioned "The Ghostmate" as the hardest for them to relate to, it became a natural choice. It is Kingston's brevity and vagueness in her combining and retelling of the Chinese *chuanqi* and Pu Songling's ghost stories that render it hard for an unfamiliar reader to approach. For a reader familiar with Pu's ghost stories, Kingston's changes only help bring out her own implications. To combat this problem, I first told the students the life story of Pu Songling—how he, after failing the Imperial Examination himself, sold tea to thirsty travellers in exchange for stories, which he rewrote and refined and published. Then I photocopied one of his well-known ghost stories, "The Painted Skin"[1], and had the students read it for a more direct experience. Afterwards, we discussed in class what such a story would mean to a reader in China a few centuries ago, how a child would respond to such a story, and why Kingston wants to rewrite such stories into her book.

Evaluating the Course

At the end of the four weeks that we spent on *China Men*, I distributed another questionnaire:

1. What was your experience with *China Men*?
2. Which section or what aspect in the book did you find most difficult?
3. Was the discussion of Chinese culture and customs helpful? Do you think that more information of this kind would help you understand the book better?
4. Would you say that reading the book helped know the Chinese Americans better? Or did it make no difference?
5. What would you suggest to make reading the book a more valuable learning experience?

Students' responses to the first question varied. Some said that the book was exciting but at the same time intimidating. Some said that it was hard reading, which killed any interest they might have had. In the answers to the second question, most students agreed that "The Ghostmate" was the most difficult chapter, and the most difficult aspect of the book was to relate the intertexts to the main chapters. Almost everyone answered *yes* to number three and thought that more information about Chinese culture might be helpful but probably not essential. Most answers to number four were positive but some also pointed out that it might not apply. The students offered many interesting suggestions in their answers to number five. Some suggested that we could have seen a film about the Chinese Americans or visited the local Chinese church. One student even suggested that we should have all eaten a meal at a Chinese restaurant together to obtain some real feeling about being Chinese American.

The students really liked the format of the course; that is, focusing on the teaching of one book as the model of tackling a multicultural text and then trying their own approach. In their ensuing presentations on *Love Medicine*, *Borderlands*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, they paid special attention to the aspects that we stressed in our discussion on *China Men*. The presenters did wonderful research on their subjects and explicated the origins of the Indian myths in *Love Medicine*, the meanings of some recurrent Spanish words in *Borderlands*, and the brief history of Eatonville in Florida. Of course, I am aware that noticing only some specific cultural references in these books may misdirect the students in their reading because they may overlook crucial tropes and motifs. So long as we can help them understand these references in the context of the whole book, however, such attention is still a valid and valuable beginning. We should not forget that most of these students have had no experience in the study of literature; clarifying some cultural references is more concrete and easier than discussing a central theme and may help break the ice for them. Moreover, aren't we teaching multicultural texts to introduce these cultures to the students?

In this sense, there should be no doubt that it is beneficial for the students to have a Chinese teach them *China Men*. I won't hesitate to admit that an African American woman has more to offer the students in teaching *Their Eyes Were Watching God* than I can possibly learn in a short period of time. This is not merely a matter of the amount of academic knowledge that we have; it concerns the ingrained knowledge of cultural experience on a personal intimate level. Before I came to the United States, I read a lot of books and saw a lot of movies about this country. Even now, after five years of living here, often there are little daily surprises that make me wonder at the gap between "knowing" a culture and being part of it. Since every culture is overwhelmingly complex, how can an outsider possibly "know" it without having lived it? Furthermore, simply knowing something about a culture doesn't mean that a person understands that culture and people. Paula Rabinowitz once acknowledged that "as a white woman, I will always be an outsider to the experiences of the oppressed minorities in America" (26).

The students in my class seemed to feel that, too. During the four weeks when we discussed *China Men*, nobody ever tried to refute me; whatever I said, they just listened to in wide-eyed amazement and believed. I gradually realized that it was not my status as instructor but my ethnicity that made them so deferential to me. Their deference also silenced and enslaved them. Few students ventured their opinions on the book and, in writing the paper, most of them simply repeated what I said in class. This situation changed, however, when we moved on to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and after I told them that I knew little about Hurston and her work. Those who did their research on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, with their newly acquired knowledge, felt the subtle change of authority more keenly. They presented to the class what they found out, offered tentative interpretations of the book, and answered questions rather confidently.

This change is indicative of a paradoxical situation in the instruction of multicultural texts. On the one hand, having an instructor of the same ethnicity as the author of a text has its undeniable advantage in introducing the culture; on the other hand, such an instructor may nullify the students' courage in wending their own way through the text. If I teach *China Men* again, I will tell the students in the first class that they should feel free to interpret the book the way they want. Yes, it has a lot of Chinese cultural references, but it was written by a Chinese American who is probably more American than Chinese. Furthermore, it is "Kingston's reclaiming of America" (Wang 1988, 18) and should be considered a book "with the central codes of Americanness" (Sollors 1986, 8). In other words, as white American readers, they should feel that they have equal rights to approach the book from their own personal and cultural perspectives. In this aspect, a white teacher can do equally well in helping the students respond to a multicultural text as a white American. Finally, no matter who teaches the book, it really depends on the students to gain something from it. There is a Chinese saying that masters can only help apprentices get started; apprentices have to rely on themselves for the real training.

Note

This story is available in several English translations of Pu Songling's (pronounced Pu Sung Ling's) stories. I used the version translated by Yang Zhihong in the 1982 collection *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, Ltd.). General translators for the collection are Lu Yunzhong et al.

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14 Fear and Loathing in the Classroom; Or, Who's Afraid of Stephen Crane's "The Monster"?

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Recently, Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, called for an examination of the "Africanist presence" in the U.S. canon. This process newly refigures the "old" canon, but as her title suggests, it is an experience fraught with the tentative experiments and accidental discoveries common to childhood sport. The anxieties for both teacher and student produced by Stephen Crane's "The Monster"—the very title of which means *warning*[1]—resonate in just this way in the ethnically diverse classroom. My discussion of teaching this lesser known piece about race relations by one of the best known U.S. authors is grounded in one such encounter in an undergraduate survey of late nineteenth-century literature which I taught at the University of Washington to twenty-three Chicano, Filipino, African American, and Anglo sophomores.[2] In this context, the challenge presented by "The Monster"—nowhere more acute than in the multicultural classroom—derives from the fact that it generates a host of often thorny issues concerning not only canonicity but also claims to cultural authority.

Having a Say

To a certain degree, "The Monster" is overdetermined by the assumptions students of even diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds bring with them about the celebrated author. Whether or not *The Red Badge of Courage* was required high school fare for them, students generally know (either from predictable course booklists or from an instructor's own classroom cues) that Crane is an "important U.S. author." Although students may share this common ground, it is also the first ground broken. Infrequently taught to undergraduates despite the overexposure of the author, "The Monster" is an appealingly "irregular" text; the only work of Crane's that deals overtly with the era of Jim Crow, it is less easily assimilable to traditional approaches to Crane's *oeuvre*, to the genre of American realism, and to the canon in general. In class I mentioned John Berryman's claim that the story represents an unresolved "revolution in Crane's aesthetic" (192), primarily because unlike *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* and *The Red Badge of Courage*, the story is a study of society rather than individuals. Upon hearing the suggestion that this story is not one that all the authorities (critics, teachers, textbooks) have pronounced final judgment upon, and further, that the work can be loosely classified as engaged in social commentary rather than individual profile, students seemed to position themselves differently vis-à-vis the text: they felt authorized to speak. Less canonical in students' eyes, the work became less intimidating to those who did not see themselves represented in an all male, white canon. This potentially empowering shift in perspective I locate as the inaugural source of one of my most productively dissonant classroom experiences.

In a guided freewrite in which I asked them to speculate on why and in what ways they were initially more vocal on this text than, say, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, one student, David, associated his freer speech with a movement away from a first-person narrator in "The Monster." As he explained it,

> When you have to be in one person's head all the time, there's no room for you, especially if he or she is white and of some class you don't know. I mean when it's someone else, some narrator who's talking about Life, you just know he can't say it all, can't even say it all right maybe. So I feel like I can have my say after all.

We had discussed and read other works with a third-person narrator; but according to this account, in the case of "The Monster" the narrator's race and class were more significant factors. David (who self-identified as Chicano for the first time during our class discussions about this story) argued that the narrator of "The Monster" clearly had an "Anglo" perspective on "Life." No longer forced to identify with this perspective (as in the first-person narration, which he found somewhat coercive), David could critique it. "Life," he explained in class, included *him*, and since the narrator comments on a racially mixed town community, he was justified in commenting on that commentary.

As this student's response suggests, the *extra*literary exigencies accompanying the text, and its emotionally volatile project of representing race and dialect, powerfully came to bear in a way unprecedented that quarter. "The Monster" is about the white fear and condemnation of a black man, Henry Johnson, disfigured in a fire when he saves a white boy, Jimmie. Jimmie's father, Dr. Trescott, is the "moon" (451) to his son, to Henry, and to the townspeople; but his status is eroded when Henry literally loses his face to the flames, and Trescott opts to keep him alive to the town's dismay. The effaced black man horrifies the townspeople, who ostracize him and also eventually Trescott, who out of a sense of obligation seeks to protect Henry. The students' own responses to a white male writer writing about race—and in my case, to a white female teacher teaching a white male writer writing about race—became the most compelling motivation and basis for literary interpretation. This did not mean that students *only* pointed to personal experience rather than textual representation when responding to the piece of fiction, but that the complicated relationship between texts and audience (between white-authored texts and nonwhite audiences, and between dated texts and contemporary audiences) was foregrounded as an explicit problem in our class discussions. By no means did this render everything safely "academic"; in fact, I found that negotiating between personal response and pedagogical pressure—that is, by working with their own often culturally-specific reactions within the constraints of the classroom—the students, using "The Monster," put in question social and institutional authorities, including this teacher's own.

I offered the students an account of my own initial reactions to the story in an attempt to dispel the sense that professors are, as bell hooks puts it, "all-knowing silent interrogators" (hooks 1994, 21). Hooks notes that "empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive" (21).

Empowered in ways I could not predict during this process of mutual confession, students raised the issue of nonwhite readers of white-authored texts. David mentioned his sense of newly acquired authority, and other students, who had not previously considered how texts construct positions for, and suggest the racial positionality of, readers, also mentioned that they felt a sense of resentment that certain books we had read implied—indeed insisted upon—a white readership. The white students remained silent during these class discussions, but their written freewrite responses indicated a growing defensiveness. ("Why slam Trescott anyway? He's trying to do the right thing. You can't do anything right anymore.") I was also hearing a desire for my intervention on their behalf ("You're white, too; why aren't you saying anything about being made to feel guilty?"). The Chicano, Filipino, and African American students shared in a reevaluation of their initial sympathetic responses to the liberal but patronizing Dr. Trescott, but two of the white students, in particular, felt that to qualify Trescott's benevolence was to do violence to the story—and, by implication and more revealingly, to criticize them. I was concerned that the class had at this point divided more or less along racial lines because it served to align the students of color with Henry, and to reinforce whites' identification with only white characters. The latter group then tended to produce interpretations which were, in effect, staged defenses of the whites' behavior.

I found it useful to discuss how the story (very much like *Maggie*) manipulates the (implied white, upper- or middle-class) reader into a sense of moral outrage even as it preserves a certain emotional distance from the characters, and how readerly stances are always implied. In Crane's earlier impressionistic sketches of city life, for example, the *other half* is aestheticized, part of a textured effect that Alan Trachtenberg refers to as *painterly* (142). In "The Monster," on the other hand, the characters move beyond two-dimensionality, laying claim to a different relation with the *objective* writer and the reader held morally at bay. As in *Maggie* (from which I read short clips for comparison) the reader also feels the indignant dismay of the patrician onlooker, but not without qualifications: "After all," Sherry, a Filipino woman, wrote in one of three papers, "why do we end up feeling so bad for Trescott and his wife [none of her friends will come to tea with her because of the association with Henry] and forget about Henry? *He's* the hero; he got hurt, and no one wants him anymore, including us. I even forgot to think about what happened to him at the end because I was too wrapped up in those stupid tea cups."

How the text aligned what had previously seemed to them neutral readerly sympathies made the students more suspicious of the text, a consequence of their acknowledgement of themselves as participants (and hitherto unknowing ones) in the text's "meanings." But it also made the students more suspicious of each other; they started addressing one another directly (rather than directing comments to me) and refused to let the silent white students remain uninvolved. David, particularly, wanted confirmation from Joe, a white student who made displeased noises when David spoke. He began at this point to turn regularly to Joe and ask rhetorically, but not altogether unaggressively, "And what do *you* think?"

One of the lesson plans for this text included an analysis of the naming and unnaming of Henry as alternately a *saint* (471), a *devil* (479), a *monster* (489), a *thing* (489). We had explored the cultural connotations of the words as well as their functions in the text, especially as they related to Henry's progression from being humorously indulged to—after the burning—revered, demonized, and finally dehumanized. But the numerous racial epithets and casual generalizations (from *nigger, coon,* and *monkey* to comments about the natural submissiveness of Henry's "race") could not be resolved by simply addressing connotations or literary stereotyping. Henry's heroic rescue of Jimmie, for instance, is somewhat vitiated by his sudden atavistic regression:

> His legs gained a frightful faculty of bending sideways. . . . From the way of him, then, he had given up almost all ideas of escaping from the burning house, and with it the desire. He was submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration. (464)

When faced with no escape, he cries out in "the negro wail that had in it the sadness of the swamps" and "then ducked in the manner of his race in fights" (465). The language created a great deal of tension in the class in part because it was clearly of a different order than the words we had been examining. Close readings were insufficient to characterize their charge, both in the text and in the students' minds. The new realization that they could individually resist as well as generate interpretations of the story by how they placed themselves in relation to the narrator and the characters only made their anxiety more intense, or so it seemed. When I taught the text in a predominantly white class, the racist language made students uncomfortable, but did not leave them feeling personally implicated as it did this class.

We discussed strategies for historicizing racism, in part by attempting to reconstruct the historical and literary contexts of the text. We watched the PBS series, *Ethnic Notions,* which discusses the historical evolution and political valences of visual and literary stereotypes; we examined the specific function of the language in the text itself—what it revealed, what it accomplished in terms of characterization and plot; and we studied how to locate narrative voice and how to critique ironic narratives. Crane, for instance, describes the family of Bella Farragut, Henry's girlfriend, as engaged in aping mannered society: "They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hours, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys" (457). Crane equally skewers the posturing of the "large throngs" of young white men who loll on sidewalks criticizing park bands not because they dislike the music but because "it was fashionable to say that manner of thing" (458). Noting that the narrator created ironic distance from both whites and blacks, however, did not take the sting out of the racial slurs in which characterizations of the latter group were always couched. And three of the black students in particular resisted the reduction of race to a function of rhetoric, especially as it entailed privileging my authority over theirs.

Who's to Say

The ensuing discussions about who knew more, and what constituted the knowing, tended to temporarily alienate African American students from Filipino, Chicano, and Anglo students. And my knowing more about the historical period seemed particularly threatening to those students' own familiarity with and personal investment in the material. In what I at first interpreted as digressions in class conversations, I was frequently challenged about the particulars (the dates, the primary litigants, the implications) of Jim Crow segregation laws, and about my own familiarity with writers, black and white, of the *fin de siècle*. What these students were after was not, as I had first thought, reassurance about my competence as a teacher, but rather my concession that as a white woman my response to "The Monster" was not commensurate with theirs, that *experientially* they came to the text with a different kind of authority than mine. Even as the white students made explicit pleas for a kind of racial alliance with me, the black students seemed to be asking for and then insisting that I openly sanction their own authority before the class. At the same time, an African American woman was openly chided by her black peers for not knowing the definition of *cakewalk*, a term used in the novel, though it was not clear from their own descriptions that they initially knew what it referred to. That incident with the increased pressure on some to "know" things, and on others not to automatically claim the knowledge, became the focal point of a discussion which concerned the explicit assumptions behind such criticisms: what is one, for instance, allowed *not* to know as well as know?

The six African American students—Ray, Maryann, George, Sandra, Jeff, and Terri—felt students who were Anglo, Filipino, or Chicano had no real authority to speak to the issue of race and thus to the story at all, since, they argued, *race* was defined as *Black*. But David said heatedly that that left him yet again with no say, and Sherry insisted that within the terms of the story, race meant in fact much more, and pointed to Crane's use of dialect. The black characters speak dialect, which is clearly marked as nonstandard and serves to stigmatize them when set against Trescott's dialogue. But the language of the Swedish barber, Reifsnyder, is also dialectal and thus also ethnically coded and class coded. By looking at the Swede and by scrutinizing the *whites* in the story, students began to racially bracket for examination whiteness. And instead of isolating "racism" from the reading of the text—that is, instead of seeing racist language as infuriating but incidental to their understanding of the text—they produced a "reading" of race in "The Monster." At the risk of consolidating the separate students into the "class" (and by no means do I wish to suggest that a shared reading produced racial harmony) I must say that almost all participated in a very different kind of interpretation of racial troping in the story: they watched whites watching a black man. By, in a sense, stepping back from the story as they looked into it, they put the white townspeople under the same evaluative gaze that the town subjects Henry to, and in doing so they found that the white society, not Henry, was monstrous.

Saying the Unsaid

Class discussions moved from townspeople's projections onto Henry's "reflective face" to white constructions of blackness in general. We had talked about the ways in which Henry loses his name and his identity once burned, but now students reexamined the subtler politics of racial representation by looking at passages prior to Henry's "effacing" (he literally loses his face in the fire). Henry at the outset of the novel, for instance, is described as a "negro who cared for the doctor's horses" (451). Such a characterization, David and Mary, a white student, pointed out, is no straightforward description; aligning him with his work, the image portrays Henry only in relation to his labor for whites. The whites see what they want to in the man, and when he appears otherwise (when, for example, Henry dresses up to go courting Bella) the whites cannot recognize him at all. As Henry strolls by the barber shop, the whites argue over what they see—I quote at some length because the students fixed on this passage in particular:

> "Wow!" [Griscom the lawyer] cried . . . "you ought to see the coon that's coming!"
>
> Reifsnyder and his assistant instantly poised their razors high and turned towards the window. Two belathered heads reared from the chairs. The electric shine in the street caused an effect like water to them who looked through the glass from the glamour of Reifsnyder's shop. In fact, the people without resembled the inhabitants of a great aquarium that here had a square pane in it. Presently into this pane swam Henry Johnson.
>
> "Chee!" said Reifsnyder. He and his assistant with one accord threw their obligations to the winds and leaving their lathered victims helpless, advanced to the window. "Ain't he a taisy!" said Reifsnyder, marvelling.
>
> But the man in the first chair, with a grievance in his mind, had found a weapon. "Why that's only Henry Johnson, you blamed idiots! Come on now, Reif, and shave me. What do you think I am—a mummy?"
>
> Reifsnyder turned in a great excitement. "I bait you any money that vas not Henry Johnson! . . . That man was a Pullman-car porter or someding. How could that be Henry Johnson?" (455)

The barbershop group makes Henry into a spectacle well before he is burned, viewing him as under a glass, as if "in a fishbowl." Although aquariums are designed to offer unlimited visibility, fully exposing its occupants, Ray and Terri noticed that the whites' vision is in fact impaired, "watery," distorted. They do not see Henry clearly; and "coon" functioned in this context as an indication that they at first can only see him through the obfuscating filter of a stereotype. "Coon" had been a very touchy term for the class, and yet seeing it used by Ray and Terri to illuminate the limited perspective of the white townspeople enabled the white students who had remained (sometimes sullenly) silent to feel less defensive. In a discursive footnote in one paper, Mary explained,

> I could see that I was not those people [Griscom, Reifsnyder and his assistant], and I knew then, when Terri said how those particular characters couldn't see straight, that no one could think that just because I was white I was those particular people. I can see also Ray's point better without that pressure, I guess.

Mary's paper, in fact, developed Ray's and others' insights, and discussed the ways in which the lathered heads, resembling "mummies" in the text evoke Henry's bandaged face when first burned. In class, she also noted the parallels made between the whites and the blacks in "The Monster" (Jimmie and Henry are initially described as "having minds precisely alike"), a complication earlier overlooked because the focus on the racist language preempted the search for other relations.

The ways in which the townspeople and Henry were yoked proved to be the basis upon which the students arrived at what they more or less collectively defined as "white parasitism." White parasitism meant the ways in which whites in the story feed on blacks, making them the focus of gossip and endless talk. Jimmie, for instance, compulsively "witnesses" Henry just as the barbershop folk do. And his "rise" as a man from a boy occurs in direct proportion to Henry's "fall" from social grace. (Jimmie changes from a shy lonely boy to the "boss" of his group when he teases "the monster" in front of them [496].) We had discussed the term *bildungsroman*, and Henry, a Filipino American, said that Henry's decline, especially when set against Jimmie's ascent and coming of age, could be called a *reverse bildungsroman*.

This creation of strategic expressions I associate with their move toward composing rather than decoding texts. As David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky argue, reading is a negotiable transaction with a text rather than an obedient search for meaning already lodged in it. The notion that students participate in the reading of a text, they argue, differs from those "liberation pedagogies [which] restore to students their 'natural' voices" (7) in that participatory readings call into play what George Steiner calls the "needs of privacy and territoriality vital to our identity" (473). In this multicultural classroom, especially when it focused on representations of ethnicity, the sense of cultural territoriality was indeed violated and readers left somewhat bereft. Students of color had not found a satisfactory way of talking about material they felt to be *about* them in some way, yet not speaking *to* them. Deriving a specialized terminology within the context of the class represented an effort to create a discourse which negotiated both academic imperatives (the necessity to generalize, to abstract, to justify statements in terms of the story) and personal needs as a reader. As Bartholomae argues,

> A classroom performance represents a moment in which, by speaking or writing, a student must enter a closed community, with its secrets, codes, and rituals. . . . The student has to appropriate or be appropriated by a specialized discourse. . . . [She] has to invent [herself] as a reader and . . . invent an act of reading by assembling a language to make a reader and a reading possible, finding some compromise between idiosyncracy, a

> personal history, and the requirements of convention, the history of an institution. (8)

The striking quality about the expression, "white parasitism," is that the white students felt that because there was now extant a functional term which related directly to the novel rather than (so it had seemed, they said) more indiscriminately to them as whites, they could also join in a critique of "The Monster" and thereby engage the "requirements of convention." Furthermore, terms such as *reverse bildungsroman* and *white parasitism* gave both contour and focus to words like *racism* (which had become somewhat catch-all in class), for it spoke to the peculiarities that the trope of blackness fills in the white imagination in that text.

Such a consolidation of sentiment—not of opinion but of the feeling that all had the ability to speak—was not without its consequences for me. My own complicity in making "The Monster" a "spectacle" on the syllabus came under discussion. I had placed the title under the ponderous heading of "Realism and Race," which functioned as a flag around which all the clichés about race might cluster prior to an individual reading of the text. I had not so blatantly marked the other novels we read. For example, I placed Chopin's *The Awakening* under the less determining though as misleading heading, "The Subject and Society." The headings implied that issues of race were linked to (and limited by) questions of genre, while issues of gender fell under more "universal" problems of individuality and social identity. Chopin's novel is not identified as a piece about a middle-class white woman's experience; hence, the headings left unmarked gender and class but not race. Furthermore, the headings offered no clue as to how the texts might function in relation to each other, either in the class or in literary history.

The cultural heterogeneity of the class, which put pressure on traditional readings of "The Monster," led I believe to the students' ability to constitute a multivocal reading body which questioned both text, teacher, *and* teaching materials. My own practices have changed as a result and have, I hope, implications for other classrooms and other teachers. Rather than wait, ad hoc, for issues to arise and hostilities to brew, I now build into all my literature courses class days called "framing periods," opportunities to make visible the pedagogical and theoretical frames or contexts bracketing the class. That day's agenda may be on, for instance, issues of reader response which take into account cultural as well as historical distances in reception, or, perhaps, the politics of syllabus construction.[3]

The second day of class, for instance, students read opposing comments from literary critics engaging in the canon debates (I copy excerpts onto a page or two and use them as handouts) to get a sense of the issues at stake, and then read drafts of my syllabus for the course. By showing them these drafts, which include brief rationales for the exclusion or inclusion of particular texts, students can see with what effect (and with what difficulty) theoretical discussions translate into daily practice.[4] Whether or not students always agree with my principle of selection is moot; what is important is that they are given the chance to critique the decision-making that goes into the production of knowledge, to see the other side of the "social tapestry," as Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* puts it—"the side where the threads are knotted and the loose ends [hang]" (256). The goal of this "framing" session is for students to see that syllabi only *appear* seamless, and that survey courses are more contingent than comprehensive.

Perhaps the most valuable effect of flushing out the contingencies of classroom "givens" has been the realization that educators must allow themselves to be implicated in the creation of them. In making explicit (and therefore questionable) the process by which one generates syllabi and assignments, and in making a matter of class discussion issues of text selection, reader positionality, and canonicity, a teacher surrenders the veneer of disinterestedness. This is particularly important not only in multicultural classrooms where racial and ethnic differences are often foregrounded, but in classes with predominantly white student populations taught by white instructors, wherein "whiteness"—because uncoded racially—remains an invisible factor.

I do not mean to suggest that my account of this class has a tidy *denouement;* on the contrary, as a pedagogical narrative, this should end as the class did—without interpretive consensus and with my sense that good teaching can sometimes put the lie to one's best research principles. Nevertheless, "The Monster" in the multicultural classroom suggests that playing in the dark can, after all, be an illuminating experience.

Notes

1. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that *monster* translates to *omen* or *warning* of ill. Fittingly, monsters were considered freaks indicating natural or social (or in our case, canonical) imbalance.

2. These students were matriculated but for the most part, had not yet declared their majors. There were no ESL or EOP students; that is, the students in this class had ethnically diverse backgrounds but faced no particular economic nor English language challenges. Most took the class as a distribution requirement. The survey included works by Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frank Norris, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, and Charles Chesnutt.

3. At the end of the quarter, students generate their own retrospective syllabus (complete with a course description and descriptive section headings which selectively cluster texts and ideas) and their own rationales; these are exchanged with peers and critiqued before they are handed in. These incorporate both discussion from the framing session as well as class discussion on the texts.

4. I am indebted to Johnnella Butler for the notion of formally incorporating student responses into class time. Butler argues that revisionist approaches to literature which focus on racism or sexism are "often resisted by Black and White students alike, perhaps for different reasons, including rage, anger, or shame that such atrocities were endured by people like them; indifference in the face of reality because 'nothing like that will happen again'; and anger, guilt, or shame that people of their race were responsible for such hideous atrocities. Furthermore, all students may resist the upsetting of their neatly packaged understandings of U.S. history and of their world. The teacher must know the content and be willing to facilitate the pressure-release sessions that undoubtedly will be needed. Pressure-release sessions must help students sort out facts from feelings, and, most of all, must clarify the relevance of the material to understanding the world in which we live and preventing such atrocities from recurring" (83).

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15 Canon Opener: The Single-Event Literature Course

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Despite all the talk during the past decade about canon opening, when I examine new literary anthologies and college course catalogues, I am surprised how little our discipline has actually changed. Yes, the section of the anthology devoted to the American Renaissance now includes Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe as well as Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman; and the college catalogue now lists a course titled Women Poets—but how much has really changed?

For the most part, the students in our literature courses still closely read novels, plays, poems, and short stories and discuss them in class. The literary anthologies now include more nonfiction and autobiography, thanks to Lynn Z. Bloom and others, but the new tomes that arrive in my mailbox each semester look very much like the ones that I was given when I was a graduate teaching assistant seventeen years ago. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* is a departure, offering not only a wider variety of writers but also a broader survey of literary genres, including folktales, journalism, songs, and speeches—an effort to introduce to students "reasonably familiar but undervalued writers" and to show "how a text engages concerns central to the period in which it was written as well as to the overall development of American culture" (Lauter xxxi). I understand that *The Heath Anthology* is selling fairly well, but I do not sense that it is being widely imitated.

I have tried recently, with some success, another way of opening—I mean really opening—the literary canon, not just by including a freshly rediscovered writer or two on my students' required reading lists, but using in the classroom the kinds of texts that are rarely included in literature courses. My vehicle is the literature course built around a single, pivotal historical event. My goal, in such a course, is to examine the event from as many different perspectives as the semester's time limit permits, which allows me to include in the syllabus a very wide variety of writers and texts. It can be a canon-opening experience.

The Single-Event Literature Course

The single-event literature course focuses on a single historical event, allowing students to investigate it through a variety of texts—not just the standard novel, short story, poetry, autobiography, and drama, but also song lyrics, newspaper articles, speeches, letters, as well as films and photographs. For many instructors, opening the canon merely means including nonwhite and women writers on the required reading list. The kind of course that I am suggesting encourages teachers to include on their lists writers whom we might not even have previously considered writers—composers of songs, diaries, speeches, letters, and other kinds of texts that are often excluded from literary anthologies and to which our students are rarely exposed.

My first effort at designing such a course occurred in the fall 1992 semester, when I offered a course on the literature of the Civil War at Roger Williams University. The course falls under the rubric of our Senior Seminar, which all English majors must complete. During the fall semester, the students read a body of literary works under a topic selected by the instructor; during the spring semester, the students write a thesis based on those readings. In the previous two years that the course had been offered, the instructors teaching it chose to focus on major literary figures—the Brontës one year, Dickens and Dostoevsky the next.

For several reasons, I wanted to stray from the major-figure format. One of my reasons was a desire to include in the course an examination of gender and racial issues. Obviously, that would be easier if I designed a course that covered several writers rather than one or two. A course on the literature of the Civil War would certainly allow me to do that. *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature* states that the Civil War has produced more than a hundred thousand volumes (Perkins, Perkins, and Leininger 1991, 192)—so I had plenty of works from which to choose.

In selecting the required readings, I wanted to include male and female writers, black and white writers, authors included in the traditional canon and those on its fringes, eyewitnesses to the conflict and writers examining it with the hindsight of time. In other words, I chose texts whose authors would counterpoint one another. For example, I knew that I must include *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a course on the literature of the Civil War, but I wanted to "challenge" Stowe with African American voices, so I added Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

For the war texts, I chose one by a foot soldier, *The Civil War Stories of Ambrose Bierce;* one by a male nurse, Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps;* one by a female nurse, Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches;* and one by a President, a volume of Abraham Lincoln's speeches and writings. I also wanted to add the works of writers who wrote about the war without having seen it, so I included Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

Although the above list did achieve the variety that I wanted, it is, for the most part, canon-based. Writers like Whitman, Crane, and Faulkner have long been part of the canon,and the others have recently had their works included in the standard anthologies. So I tried to expand the reading list by having at least some students do oral reports on literary works that are not, and probably will not be, part of the canon: William Lloyd Garrison's writings; Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery;* Mary Prince's autobiography; Robert Sherwood's play, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois;* Edward Everett's oration at Gettysburg. Other students chose more commonly assigned works like Herman Melville's *Battle-Pieces* and *Aspects of War,* Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Chiefly about War Matters," Thoreau's essays on slavery, and Whitman's *Specimen Days.*

I supplemented those readings by distributing copies of soldiers' letters and song lyrics, both of which could be played off the literary works that we were discussing in class. For example, before reading Ambrose Bierce's bitter and cynical war stories, we heard and read the lyrics of patriotic anthems like "The Battle Cry of Freedom" and "The Bonnie Blue Flag."

Before discussing Lincoln's conservative speeches on slavery and racial issues, we heard his campaign song, *Lincoln and Liberty,* which portrays him as an abolitionist. The students also saw two feature films, *Glory,* and John Huston's adaptation of *The Red Badge of Courage,* and parts of Kenneth Burns's recent award-winning PBS documentary on the war. We also perused a score of photographs, mostly by Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner.

Hence, the students examined the war through a variety of texts: novels, short stories, poems, autobiographies, diaries, journalism, speeches, letters, proclamations, feature and documentary films, and photographs. The composers of these texts included soldiers, slaves, politicians, nurses, civilians, and professional writers. And many of these texts and writers are exactly the kind that we exclude from our literature courses, even in these canon-busting times.

In fact, if I were to teach the course again, I would want to include more nontraditional works rather than texts by the likes of Whitman, Crane, and Faulkner. I would certainly include Mary Chesnut's Civil War diary, because my required reading list was short on both Southerners and civilians. I would also want to include an officer's perspective, perhaps selections from either the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, whose writings were praised by Mark Twain, Gertrude Stein, and Edmund Wilson in *Patriotic Gore* (131–73), or James Longstreet's *From Manassas to Appomattox*. The Supreme Court opinion on Dred Scott could be included in the section of the course that dealt with slavery. I would like to include Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, the kind of popular novel so rarely assigned in college-level courses, but its length—1,100 pages—would make it difficult to include without eliminating other works.

A new anthology of Civil War writing would certainly be useful if I were to teach the course again. *The Real War Will Never Get in the Books*, edited by Louis P. Masur and published by Oxford University Press, includes works by Whitman, Melville, and Douglass, as well as pieces by writers who never find their way into the anthologies: John De Forrest, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Charlotte Forten. Similar anthologies, perfectly suited for courses like the one I am suggesting here, have also been recently published. Penguin's *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader*, which includes documents, speeches, and first-hand accounts of the civil rights movement from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the present, and *The Beat Generation Reader*, which includes fiction, poetry, journalism, autobiography, and song lyrics, would work well in courses built around the Civil Rights Movement or the 1950s.

Results

Overall, my first experience teaching a single-event literature course was positive. Most of the students involved in Literature of the Civil War expressed satisfaction on the end-of-semester evaluation form. A few specifically mentioned what one student called the "multi-media approach" as a course highlight.

My attempt to get students to address racial and gender issues was generally successful. Our discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, not surprisingly focused on Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom, with a handful of students vehemently opposing Stowe's protagonist and a handful finding him heroic. When that discussion had run its course, I asked the anti-Tom students if it were possible for a white writer to capture accurately the experiences of a different racial group. One student broadened the discussion by noting Spike Lee's comment that only an African American filmmaker could make an honest film about Malcolm X. I informed the class of the critical flak that William Styron received after publishing *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. The class members concluded that it was indeed possible for white writers to recreate the African American experience truthfully, though some students felt that Harriet Beecher Stowe had not done so.

I was also pleased that some of our discussions focused on the possibilities and limitations of the various literary genres. For example, after reading Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, one student boldly asserted that poetry and war were incompatible. Several students refuted her with examples of moving war poems, but I noted the comment of Theodor Adorno, the German philosopher, that poetry could not be used to portray the horrors of Auschwitz. We concluded that all literary forms—indeed language in general—are limited in some ways when they try to recreate the horrors and devastation of war. During another discussion that focused on genre, one student speculated that Ambrose Bierce's reputation as a "minor" writer was perhaps due to his not having written novels. This student argued that even the best short story writers—Ernest Hemingway, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, Henry James—gained their reputations by writing novels.

Learning from Experience

Despite some exciting class discussions, I feel that the course failed in some ways, and I comment on these failings so that instructors who plan to offer single-event literature courses can be prepared for some of the difficulties.

My biggest challenge was trying to get students to appreciate literary works that were not part of the canon. That was not surprising because my students were, for the most part, raised on the traditional canon and trained with the techniques of New Criticism.

Our curriculum includes an introduction to literature, a course in myth, surveys in British and American literature, a course in Shakespeare, and one in European literature. For the most part, our students read the authors and works that were required in literature courses when their instructors were in college twenty years ago. Our recent special topics courses have included offerings in *The Canterbury Tales*, the short stories of Ernest Hemingway, and Joyce's *Ulysses*—all canonical texts.

It is not surprising that many of my students had little liking for the sentimentality in works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Convinced of the New Critical values of understatement, irony, and paradox in fiction, my students frowned upon the "O gentle reader!" outbursts of Jacobs and Stowe, confirming Alfred Kazin's assertion that "too many students and readers in general are kept from Mrs. Stowe's book itself because of the frivolous and superficial literary dogma that a great novel must be all in one tone and never lose its 'cool,' that an author's views must never interrupt the course of the story and descend to preaching" (ix). I tried to get students to connect the texts to their original cultures when I suggested that both Jacobs and Stowe were trying to reach an essentially female fiction-reading public receptive to sentimentality, but that argument carried little weight with my students. My students assumed that the New Critical evaluation tools that they used were universal criteria for judging literary merit.

Hence, I now expect that students who have been trained in the analytical techniques of the New Criticism and who have encountered in their literature courses only the Great Books might be just as opposed as old-guard faculty members to canon opening. After all, opening the canon mandates that students learn new analytical skills, that they determine, for example, "not only how a poem or story is constructed, about its language and imagery, but also . . . how it 'worked' in its world (and works in ours), and how it was related to other texts of its own and other times" (Lauter 1990, xxxv). That is, for many students, a difficult skill—especially when we consider their limited knowledge of cultures of the past—and we should not assume that they will do it willingly and automatically. Nonetheless, I believe it is a skill worth learning.

I also anticipate that students might resist if they are asked to read texts that are distasteful for political or ethical reasons. For example, could my course not have included texts by Jefferson Davis and John C. Calhoun that defended slavery? What if I had assigned one of the many anti-Uncle-Tom novels published after *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin, works that justified slavery on religious, economic, and scientific grounds? Might not a course on the literature of World War II include *Mein Kampf*? Opening the canon might involve asking students to read texts that they would find politically incorrect. All of my students were white, but it is not hard to imagine black students vehemently opposing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or even *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* if I had chosen to include it.

The prospect of coping with such challenges might indeed intimidate instructors considering the inclusion of certain kinds of reading material in the type of course that I am outlining here. Untenured faculty who have heard the usual stories about protests staged and memos of complaints filed with deans would probably be particularly wary. Nonetheless, if the course is specifically designed to examine a historical event from a variety of perspectives, then the inclusion of such readings is certainly justified. It would, of course, be wise to inform students on the course syllabus and during the opening-day course overview that some of the readings might be considered insensitive or offensive to various groups and to remind students that the course readings were chosen not as vehicles to put forth the political positions of the instructor but in an attempt to capture the wide variety of literary expressions surrounding the event around which the course has been developed.

Faculty members should probably sense the political climate of their own departments and institutions and act accordingly. Perhaps a memo to the department chair or dean describing the nature of the course and the reading list—submitted *before* the semester opens—would go a long way toward protecting the instructor if problems arise during the semester. Instructors should also find comfort in the fact that the incidents involving challenges to reading lists on the grounds of political correctness have probably been relatively few, though perhaps loudly reported, and that teachers' unions and the American Civil Liberties Union have been staunch in their defense of instructors' academic freedom. In short, I doubt that many instructors would suffer excessive harassment if they include *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or even the speeches of Jefferson Davis in a course on the literature of the Civil War.

Not surprisingly, two canonical works, *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, emerged as the two most popular books in the course. Nonetheless, I was pleased that students took a great liking to the stories of Ambrose Bierce, whom literary history has treated with only modest respect, and to Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, an undervalued gem. Some students also saw Lincoln in a new light, as a writer rather than as some figure out of history.

Conclusion

Though I claim only modest success with my course on the literature of the Civil War, I remain convinced that the literature course built around a single event is one of the best vehicles to engage students in a canon-opening experience. Adding a nonwhite writer or two and a few more women authors to the standard survey course does not really expose students to the wide variety of literary voices. Nor is that goal accomplished by "ghetto-izing" noncanonical writers in one or two special courses like Women Poets or African American Drama, though I would not deny that such courses have improved English curricula.

The single-event literature course prompts students to interdisciplinary thinking and, as I have tried to show, exposes them to literary and visual texts that are too often excluded from traditional college literature courses. Furthermore, at schools where such curricular innovation is possible, single-event literature courses can be linked with courses in other disciplines that treat the same subject. For example, during a single semester, students could take a cluster of courses in literature, history, economics, and art or music built around an event like the Civil War, the Great Depression, or the Civil Rights Movement. The case for this kind of interdisciplinary study has been eloquently made by educators like Ernest Boyer (83–101), and I need not restate the argument here. I wish only to add that despite recent curricular reforms, true interdisciplinary study as articulated by Boyer and others is still rare in undergraduate programs.

If exposing students to a wider variety of literary voices and genres is a worthwhile goal for this country's English departments, then we must do more than subtly adjust our syllabi and add a course or two to our curricula. The approach offered here is, I believe, a more effective way to meet that goal. If preparing our students for life after college is our paramount goal, then the kind of course that I am proposing here makes sound educational sense. In their lives after college, our students will encounter a wide variety of literary texts—newspaper articles, annual reports, business letters, advertising copy—and they will be asked to interpret visual images as well. The single-event literature course can take students beyond the traditional genres of fiction, drama, poetry, and autobiography and provide students with evaluative and interpretive skills that will prepare them for the diverse world in which they will have to function.

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Afterword

Getting Beyond "Kum Ba Ya"

James Marshall
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A short time ago, while attending a conference in Oregon, two friends and I broke away for a day, rented a car, and drove along the Columbia Gorge into the mountains east of Portland. It may have been the early spring weather, or the guilty pleasure of not being where we were supposed to be, but while driving we began concocting a list of "Multiculturalism's Greatest Hits"—top-forty songs that spoke loudly and plaintively about the value of tolerance, understanding, peace, and good will. There was "What the World Needs Now," of course, and "Get Together" by the Youngbloods ("C'mon people now/Smile on your brother/Everybody get together/Try to love one another right now"). We remembered "Crystal Blue Persuasion," "Peace Train," the egregious "Ebony and Ivory," the weepy "Abraham, Martin, and John," the ever classic "Kum Ba Ya." Maybe you had to be there. But it seemed funny at the time, and slightly sacrilegious—a very minor, back-pew, sophomoric sort of humor inspired by the leaden seriousness of much talk at professional conferences and most talk about multicultural issues. We felt like kids skipping church. And multiculturalism was the church.

Confessing to a day of imperfect faith may, of course, hobble my effort here to argue for more reflective and more realistic approaches to teaching the new canon. But I don't think we can begin designing those approaches until we find a way to melt down some of the pious certainties that encase our language and our thinking about multicultural issues. When I hear the words with which we publicly make our stand—*marginalize* and *hegemony, disempower,* and *problematize, sexism, racism, homophobia*—I feel I am entering a world where the lines are clearly drawn, where virtue can be easily seen and the hurtful easily avoided. But when I enter my classroom to teach, or when I talk openly with other teachers, most of this confidence dissolves. In the world of chalkboards, offices, and lounges littered with naugahyde furniture, there is confusion, ambivalence, and silence. If we are to move beyond a simple and righteous belief in our own good will, if we are to get beyond "Kum Ba Ya," we have to learn to talk about these things, talk about them in ways that invite response and that encourage further reflection.

The essays gathered in this volume represent an important and deeply intelligent effort to begin that conversation. In what follows, I would like to amplify some of the themes they have articulated and to outline some of the work that I think remains to be done.

What Will We Teach?

The politics of multiculturalism were simpler when a clearly established Western canon, largely male and mostly white, really did dominate the teaching of literature. But as Bruce Goebel and Jim Hall suggest in their introduction to this volume, those days are no more. Not only have Zora Neale Hurston, Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, and Black Elk found a place on our reading lists, so have Roseanne Barr and Tina Turner. In the general education literature program that I direct at The University of Iowa, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is probably the most frequently taught book, and every semester I receive requests from instructors to teach texts that I have not read, from literary traditions with which I am unfamiliar. The Western canon as inscribed in the old *Norton Anthology* and as taught in my own classes as an English major no longer anchors the literature curriculum, and the more we rail against it, the more we resemble Ronald Reagan gesturing angrily at an evil Soviet empire even as it was swerving toward disintegration. For Reagan, as for us, it's hard to give up an opponent we've grown used to.

Our problem, then, is not how to remove an established Western canon from its position of power, but what to do now that it's gone. In facing this problem, I think we need to address at least two deeply related issues.

First, I think we need to recognize that inclusivity, by itself, is an inadequate conceptual tool for constructing a new literature curriculum. It was easy to see what the old canon excluded, and it was easy to argue that marginalized texts should be brought nearer to the center. But with the old canon in disarray, it's hard to locate centers and margins, and it has become increasingly clear that inclusivity, as an argument, can only work when there exists an exclusivity to push against. At one time we could argue that a text should be taught because it had been excluded unfairly. But if a text is no longer excluded, if there is no established argument for *not* including it, then we need to find stronger reasons *for* including it. Every curriculum has borders, and we must decide where they are.

If inclusivity is one argument whose usefulness is passing, representativeness is another. Again, the old canon provided a stable background against which we could see the groups that had not been included: women, people of color, lesbians and gays. And in arguing for the inclusion of these groups in our curriculum, we could argue that they should be "represented." But what does it mean to say that African Americans have been represented in a curriculum? That Richard Wright somehow stands for Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and Ralph Ellison and Billie Holiday? That he speaks for them? That there is a universal African American experience that can be abstracted and voiced through one or even several writers? The notion of representativeness, as it has been used in our arguments, has been imported from the world of democratic politics, but it probably can't carry us very far in deciding what to teach. Writers do not represent other writers, and when we assume that they can, we not only impoverish the study of literature, we fall victim, I think, to the most trivial kind of tokenism.

The basic point, of course, is that the field of literary studies has been dramatically altered by arguments for multiculturalism, and our arguments for multiculturalism must be altered as well. We are now in a position to choose more freely what we will teach, and it is this assumption of responsibility that I think worries us the most. It was easier and a lot more fun to protest decisions that someone else had made; it's harder to build something new. But it is precisely that task of construction that awaits us now.

How Will We Teach?

The task of deciding what to teach, however, while difficult, may seem relatively painless compared to the challenge of reimagining our work in classrooms. Debates about canons have a long history, stretching back at least to the construction of the Christian Bible in the early church, and the assumptions and arguments of those on either side can usually be anticipated with some precision. We know how to argue about the value of books; that is what we do for a living. What we have not, as a profession, learned to do so well is to reason and to argue with one another about our teaching. There, our vocabulary is thin, our theory pedestrian. We go in, ask some questions, hold the floor and lecture once in a while. That is what we have always done. And unless there is active resistance, we may assume that we can go on teaching this way even as the kind of literature that we are teaching is changing dramatically.

But to go on as we have would be to undermine one of the most important reasons for teaching a new canon: that it includes texts that are challenging, problematic, and different from what readers may already know. As we learn to read literature from alternative traditions, and as we learn to situate that literature within the cultural and historical contexts from which it has emerged, it becomes clear that we cannot simply bring such texts into our classrooms, ask some questions, and help students work inductively to an understanding of how they are structured. That was a teaching strategy that fit comfortably with New Critical, formalist assumptions about literary meaning and with texts drawn from a common literary tradition. But as we push away from those assumptions and those texts, the work of a teacher becomes more problematic. On the one hand, teachers may feel responsible for providing more background information about the cultures and traditions that have shaped a text—a responsibility that might easily lead to more teacher-dominated discourse in the classroom. On the other hand, the challenge of forging a coherent interpretive community around such texts might be so great that teachers would simply let go—allowing each student to read independently and to think alone, without the risk of resistance or disagreement that can emerge in dialogue. Either of these moves, if established widely and consistently, would represent, I think, a net loss to our teaching. The vision of a community of students attempting together to make sense of a text, although too seldom realized, remains a defining feature of our professional culture, and its abandonment would be an unfortunate by-product of our effort to redefine the canon.

Why Should We Teach?

Here, perhaps, is our greatest uncertainty. The history of our discipline is replete with language justifying and even celebrating the study of literature. Matthew Arnold, for instance, could argue that "The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay" (306). We could, as we've learned to do, take these sentiments apart from a political perspective, asking who is to judge the "high destinies" of poetry and what peoples are to be included in "our race." But what is most striking about this sentence to me is its sense of confidence about what the study of poetry is for. Arnold was deeply worried about other things, the dissolution of religious conviction among them. But about poetry, about its importance to us, he was sure. And we, I think, are not.

One of the major theoretical tasks confronting those of us who would redesign the literature curriculum, then, is to find the language that would explain why our reading and writing and teaching are worthy of a student's interest and a taxpayer's dollar. We can no longer employ the once-comfortable arguments of old-fashioned humanism, nor the more austere arguments of a formalist aesthetic. And yet, thus far, we have found little with which to replace them. Gerald Graff has defined theory as "the kind of reflective discourse about practices that is generated when a consensus that was once taken for granted in a community breaks down." And of theory, so defined, we may have a sufficiency. But whether the kind of "reflective discourse" that Graff describes will lead, or even should lead, to a new consensus in our community remains very much in doubt.

There is a great deal of new work to be done. We seem, as a community, to be in the business of reimagining what a community might be, of wondering about the politics and value of consensus, of engaging in a long-overdue and deeply mindful interrogation of the theories and motives that inform our work in classrooms. This book is an extraordinarily thoughtful contribution to that larger project, and I am grateful to be a part of it.

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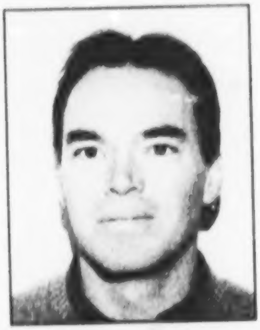

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In *Teaching a "New Canon"?* editors Bruce Goebel and James Hall connect recent research about the teaching of college literature with the ongoing debates concerning multiculturalism. Contributors from a wide range of institutions—from community colleges to large research universities—reflect on the impact of cultural diversity on the teaching process, on the teachers, on the students. This collection of essays focuses on identifying a practical pedagogy that will serve a dynamic student population and rapidly changing reading lists.

At the same time, though, *Teaching a "New Canon"?* addresses some of the inherent theoretical complexities of this paradigm shift: the position and identity of students and teachers in the classroom, geographic region and difference, and the institutional and cultural discourses that affect the teaching of literature. Contributors evaluate the adaptability of portfolios, team-teaching, theme-based units, alternative assessments, and writing assignments as potential strategies to be employed in "dealing with difference" in the literature classroom. The "new canon," this book makes clear, is much more than a given set of multicultural texts taught in the traditional way.

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